

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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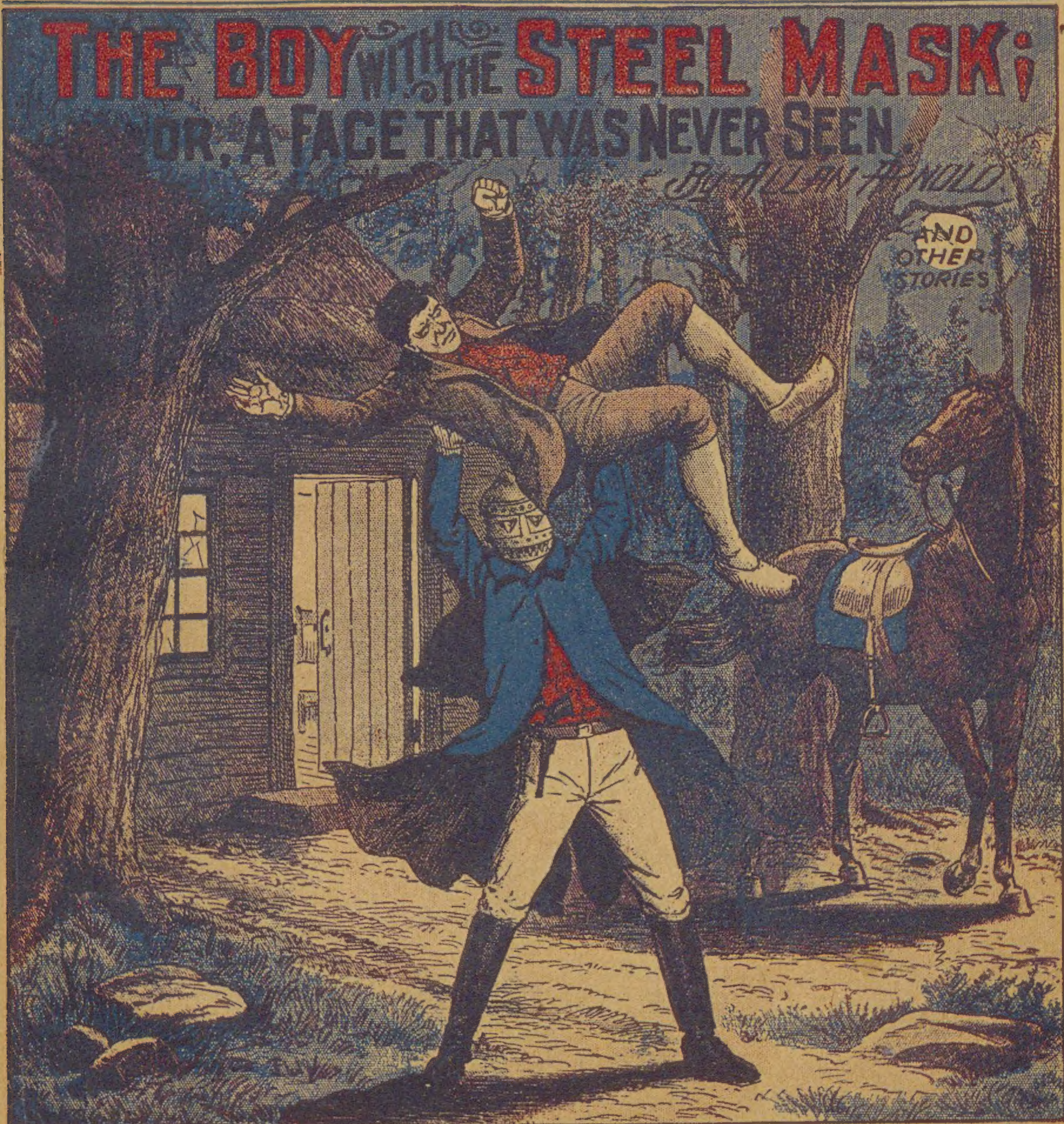
NEW YORK, OCTOBER 20, 1920.

Price 7 Cents

THE BOY WITH THE STEEL MASK; OR, A FACE THAT WAS NEVER SEEN.

By ALLAN H. WOOD

AND
OTHER
STORIES



Without apparent effort, he then lifted the woodman from the ground, raised him above his head for a moment, and then dashed him to the earth, crying: "Ungrateful dog, how dare you molest one who sought to befriend you?"

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The Boy With the Steel Mask

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By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.—Who Stole the Bride?

After the final overthrow of the great Napoleon many of the followers of his defeated army scattered through the woods of France and became outcasts to society. On the southern frontier and along to the neighborhood of Marseilles several bands were formed by the late veterans of the army, and numerous outrages were perpetrated on those who had opposed the once invincible Corsican. The government authorities were at length aroused, and decided efforts were put forth for the suppression of the lawless bands, especially in the vicinity of the city of Marseilles. As the old camp followers mixed themselves up with the smugglers from Spain, and as they could find shelter in the dense woods and wild mountains, the French authorities had a difficult task in suppressing them. After some time, however, fair order was restored, and nearly all the outlaws were either taken or driven across the frontier. There was one band in the vicinity of Marseilles that still defied all the efforts of the police and soldiers.

That band had its rendezvous in the Forest of Vindy, some miles to the south of Marseilles, and it numbered only eleven desperate men all told. For months and months after the dispersion of the other outlaws, the Free Riders of Vindy, as they were called, continued their depredations, notwithstanding the authorities at Marseilles exerted their combined energies against them. The chief of police in Paris was at length appealed to, and he at once sent one of his ablest detectives into the neighborhood. This man's name was Jacot, and he had won a very brilliant reputation for his courage, cunning and versatility of disguise in discovering plots formed by the enemies of the great Napoleon.

About two miles from the outskirts of the Forest of Vindy stood an old castle in which dwelt Count Wilburt, a man who had managed to hold his own pretty well during all the great changes going on in France in Napoleon's time, although he was in secret opposed to the great emperor. This nobleman had a gallant son of twenty-two, who had served with distinction under the great emperor, and he was then residing with his father. Count Wilburt had also a daughter, a beautiful, proud creature, who had just attained her nineteenth year. Although he was a widower for nearly eighteen years, he was a handsome, vigorous man of fifty, and when peace

was restored to the country he bethought himself of looking around for a rich bride, whose gold would enable him to restore the castle to its former splendor.

M. Morand was a rich merchant residing in Marseilles, who had a charming young daughter named Josephine. Count Wilburt was acquainted with the rich merchant, and he had met his fair young daughter several times in the city. After due consideration the titled widower proposed an alliance with the family of the humble merchant, and M. Morand, who was delighted with the proposition, eagerly accepted it, although his young daughter did not share his feelings. Now it so happened that Henry Wilburt, the count's soldier son, had often met Josephine Morand at Marseilles, and the young people were much attracted to each other. When the young man heard of the proposed alliance he was deeply mortified, but he did not utter a word of protest, knowing full well that his father was a stubborn man and that he was unscrupulous as well.

Strange to say, Isabel Wilburt highly approved of her father's marriage with the merchant's daughter, and for a secret reason of her own. It is the custom in France to give a grand feast on the occasion of the signing of the marriage contract by the parties interested, the marriage itself taking place a short time after. On the night of the marriage feast, and while all the guests were enjoying themselves at Vindy Castle, young Henry Wilburt left the grand saloon and stole away to a wing of the castle which was seldom visited by any of its inmates. On reaching the deserted wing, the young soldier stole cautiously up to a narrow hallway and knocked at an iron door, which had all the appearance of an opening to a prison cell. After a little while a small sliding panel in the upper part of the door was pushed aside and a very gruff voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"It is I—Joseph," responded the young soldier. "I came to tell you that the contract is signed, and she is lost to me. You did not keep your promise."

A voice answered:

"I will keep my promise. The signing of the marriage contract is not a marriage itself."

"But the marriage takes place in the morning," groaned the young soldier, "and then they will away to Paris, when she will be lost to me forever."

The gruff voice inside was almost brutal in its tones as he replied:

"Have I not told you that I will not fail? Have I ever broken a promise made to you yet?"

"I admit that you have not, but this is so important, Joseph, that I cannot see how you will aid me now while you are kept such a close prisoner in there."

"Yes, yes, I have been kept a close prisoner for life, yet I have a secret power that will enable me to aid you in this matter."

"Why not tell me your secret, Joseph, so that I may use it against father in this matter and then to set you free as well."

"If my secret were once known, even to you, I would be powerless to aid you. Return at once to the guests or suspicion will be aroused against you. Remember that your sister knows that you were attached to the young lady and her watchful eyes will be on you."

The young soldier groped his way along the dark passages as he muttered to himself:

"Can I believe that poor Joseph has the power to aid me? What a strange being he is, and he confined in those apartments since his childhood. No one has ever looked on his face that I am aware of, and he has never spoken a kindly word to any one save myself. Why is the unfortunate being thus confined, and why is his head ever covered by that steel mask? My father does not even know that I am aware of his presence in the deserted wing, as old Mango has sworn me to silence."

While revolving these questions in his mind Henry Wilburt reached the saloon where the gay guests were still in the full height of their enjoyment. Among those guests was Claude Morand, the young son of the merchant, a dashing young soldier who had also served in the same regiment with Henry Wilburt in the army of Napoleon. As young Wilburt was passing out of the saloon for some refreshments a small slip of paper was thrust into his hand by a person who gave him a peculiar grip at the same moment. Hastening to a secluded spot, Lieutenant Wilburt held the note to the light and read its contents, which contained the following words:

"Advise your sister to seek the blue anteroom on the right of the grand saloon as soon as possible.—Captain Mask."

The enjoyment was still kept up until near the hour of midnight, when the final dance was announced before partaking of the grand feast prepared. Count Wilburt had engaged his promised bride for the last dance, but when he sought the young lady she was not to be found. All search was useless, as Josephine Morand could not be found in any of the apartments of the castle. Finding it impossible to keep the matter a secret any longer, Count Wilburt consulted with the old merchant, who became fearfully alarmed at the disappearance of his daughter. As Count Wilburt was announcing the mysterious disappearance to his guests, his daughter stole up to her brother's side and hissed into his ear:

"This is your work, traitor, but believe me it will not avail you."

When it was found that it was useless to make further search for the missing one, all the guests

hastened away from the castle, Claude Morand leaving with the others. As Henry Wilburt was about to retire to his own apartment for the night he was suddenly seized and bound, and his captors then dragged him down into the vaults of the castle, to thrust him into one of those damp apartments which had been used as a dungeon in former days. When the four men who had seized him had retired, Count Wilburt appeared before his son, and there was a fearful expression on the face of the baffled man as he said:

"Your plot was well concocted, you perfidious wretch! My bride cannot escape far, and you will never escape while she is at liberty."

Without waiting for a reply, the angry father hastened away, carefully locking and bolting the iron door of the dungeon on his son. Early on the following morning the jailer who was selected to supply the young man with food appeared before the count and announced that his son had escaped from the dungeon during the night. Count Wilburt was astounded at the information, and so was his daughter, as they had perfect faith in all their followers.

CHAPTER II.—The Steel Mask Appears.

While the guests in the castle were in deep agitation over the strange disappearance of the promised bride, a large, silver-gray horse was dashing through the Forest of Vindy with two riders on its strong back. The foremost rider was Josephine Morand, who was enveloped in a long dark cloak, the hood of which concealed her countenance. Seated behind her, with his long arms clasped around her waist, was a boyish figure, also enveloped in a black cloak and hood. As they entered the path in the thickest part of the forest the male rider was compelled to draw up the horse a little, and the young girl then addressed him in trembling tones, saying:

"Where are you dragging me to?"

"To happiness, I trust, and away from a life of misery with the man you hate."

The rider felt the young girl shuddering in his grasp, and he sought to reassure her by saying:

"Fear not, young lady, as I am acting in behalf of Henry Wilburt."

"Then I will see him soon?"

"I trust you will see him ere morning dawns."

"Are you one of the outlaws?"

"Perhaps I am. In any case, I am Henry Wilburt's friend, and I will protect you. Will you now promise me to close your eyes until I bid you open them again, or must I blindfold you?"

"I will close my eyes."

After proceeding some distance her guide drew up, and she could hear him striking his whip on what appeared to her by the sound to be the trunk of a large tree. After a few moments' pause the horse moved on slowly again, and while he was still in motion the young girl felt herself lifted from his back and placed on the ground. The strange guide then led her along what appeared to be a hard earthen floor, and the trembling girl could soon feel a blaze of light breaking in on her closed eyelids.

"Open your eyes now."

The young girl did open her eyes, and on staring around she was surprised to find herself in a large and handsomely furnished apartment, in the center of which hung a chandelier containing four large lamps. Having gazed around the room, the young girl turned to her strange guide, who still kept the hood of his cloak over his face, and she asked:

"May I not see the countenance of one who is a friend of my dear Henry?"

The guide shook his head in a sad and solemn manner, and then flung back the hood of his cloak as he answered:

"That is all you can ever see of the face of Henry's friend."

Josephine Morand started back in amazement at the object thus presented to her. The whole head of the person before her was covered to the neck by a bright, round steel encasement which reached down to the lower part of the neck. The masked person then led the young lady to a lounge, as he continued:

"You will need refreshments after your ride, and they will be forthcoming."

"But how am I to address you, friend?"

"Call me Captain Mask, as that is the only name by which I am known to all save Henry."

"Are you then the leader of the outlaws of the forest?"

"I confess that I am."

Excusing himself in a rough manner, Captain Mask retired from the apartment, and two female attendants bearing refreshments soon appeared before the young girl. On entering another apartment, which was furnished in a plainer manner, Captain Mask found seven men, all wearing long cloaks, seated around a table drinking wine.

"Any intelligence to-night?"

One of the men arose, and, saluting his captain in military style, replied:

"Captain, I saw a suspicious-looking character lingering around the wood to-day in the direction of the castle."

"What did he appear to be?" asked the leader.

"He carried an ax on his shoulder, and he was dressed like a woodcutter, but I never saw him about here before."

"Why do you suspect him?"

"Because I watched him for some hours, and he did not cut many limbs in that time."

"Did he retire to his hut?"

"He did, Captain Mask."

"Did you pay him a visit there?"

"I did not, as I had your orders to attend a feast at the castle."

"Then pay him a visit to-morrow and see what further you can learn about him."

The leader then cast his eyes around on his followers again ere he asked:

"Who was at Marseilles to-day?"

"I was, captain," answered one of the men, standing erect at the time.

"Was there any unusual commotion there?"

"Not in the least, captain."

"Then we must be certain that they are working in secret against us. With the exception of the two mentioned, you must not venture out to-morrow, unless at my command."

At that moment another cloaked figure entered the apartment, crying:

"Hail to the Free Riders of Vindy!"

The salutation was received in silence by all except the masked leader, who arose from his seat and turned to salute the newcomer, saying:

"All hail to you, brother Morand. Why did you leave the feast so early?"

"You should be the best judge of that, captain. May I ask if she is safe?"

Captain Mask's only reply was to point to the other apartment, and he then motioned Claude Morand to take a seat at his side. While they were thus seated another of the band entered the apartment with hasty strides and approached the leader to whisper something to him. Captain Mask sprang up on the instant, exclaiming:

"The cruel wretches!"

He then turned to his followers, saying:

"I must hasten away from you now, as a friend of mine is in trouble. I will return to you in an hour or so with a friend."

He then hastened into the apartment where Josephine was seated, and said to her:

"Be not alarmed, young lady, when I tell you that Henry Wilburt has been detained by force at the castle. I am now hastening to his rescue."

The strange man then left the young lady abruptly, and in less than five minutes after he was riding through the forest on his steel-gray horse.

CHAPTER III.—The Woodcutter of Vindy.

The masked rider had gained the edge of the forest, and he was passing a small hut, when a loud, heartrending groan fell on his ears. Springing from his horse and drawing the hood of his cloak full over his face, so that the glaring eyes alone could be visible, the outlaw pushed open the door of the hut and entered. Stretched before him on a rude cot was a large, rough-looking man in the decline of life, who wore a grizzly, gray beard, a mass of matted hair, and whose eyes were rolling in their sockets at the moment. The woodman placed his hands on his breast as he replied:

"I am burning here. I feel as if a hundred fiends were gnawing at my breast. Oh, can you not give me something to relieve me?"

The masked man drew a flask from his pocket and placed the mouth of it to the sufferer's lips, as he grunted forth:

"Drink that, and it may cure you."

The rough woodman did swallow several mouthfuls from the flask, and he drew a long sigh, as he said in faint tones:

"It is good brandy."

"Yes, it is brandy, and I will leave the bottle with you to finish the cure."

"Who are you, sir, and why do you conceal your face in that hood?"

"Did I ask you who you were when I entered here to relieve you? You are either a fool or a knave to question me now."

"I crave your pardon, sir. You did serve me when I was in agony. I am a poor, miserable wretch, and I would have died if you had not come to my aid."

"Are you so very poor, then?"

"I was a soldier under the great chief, and I

served with him in Moscow and at Waterloo. I do not know who you are, and I care not if you will denounce me, but I only hope that he will soon return to lead us to glory again. I was a woodcutter before I joined the army, but I do not like the trade now, and I will not serve under the present government. Long live Napoleon!"

The hooded man strode out of the door. He was then in the act of mounting his horse, when the woodman darted at him, seized him around the waist, and attempted to drag him back into the hut. With a quick movement of his long arms Captain Mask flung off the grasp of the man and seized him around the waist in turn, flinging him to the ground, stunned.

"Ungrateful dog, how dare you molest one who sought to befriend you!"

Without uttering another word, Captain Mask hastened into the hut, where he found a strong rope, and having secured it, he bound the prisoner to a tree as he said to him:

"I will return to give you more medicine."

The strange being then sprang on his iron-gray horse and rode on in the direction of the castle. Scarcely half an hour elapsed when Captain Mask returned to the hut again, and he found his prisoner still secured to the tree. Placing a bandage on the man's eyes, he secured his legs as well as his arms, and then flung him across the back of the gray horse as a huntsman would a deer or a butcher's calf. It was a strange sight to see the powerful iron-gray horse darting through the wood with his double load. The outlaws were still awaiting the return of their leader, when his voice fell on their ears from an outer passage, crying:

"On with your hoods!"

Each of the outlaws seated at the table drew his hood over his face on the instant, so that all their features were perfectly concealed, when their leader strode into the apartment with the woodcutter flung over his shoulder, as he cried:

"Here is a present for you."

As the leader uttered the words he flung the large man on the floor and drew the hood over his own mask. Addressing the outlaw who had reported to him before, Captain Mask said:

"Is that your friend?"

The hooded outlaw nodded his head in the affirmative. The wood-cutter appeared to be dazed and terrified at finding himself in such company after the manner in which he had been treated, and he glared at the leader, as he gasped forth:

"What do you propose to do with a poor man? In whose hands am I now?"

Captain Mask at once replied:

"You are in the hands of the Free Riders of the Forest of Vindy. Have you not expressed a desire to join our band, honest fellow?"

"It appears that I must join you now."

"There is no compulsion," answered the chief. "What is your name?"

"I was called Michael Vall in the army."

"What regiment did you serve in?"

"I served in the Fourteenth Infantry."

"Who was your captain?"

"I last served under Captain Wilburt, who is a son of Count Wilburt of Vindy Castle."

"Liar!" thundered Claude. "I served in Captain Wilburt's company for the last three years, and I know every man in it."

Captain Mask then turned on the prisoner as he demanded:

"Are you not a spy?"

"Yes, I am an officer from Paris sent here to ferret out the Free Riders of Vindy. My name is Jacot."

"Then you expect death?"

"What else can I expect? Before you put me to death, however, I crave permission to ask you a few questions, as the dead can tell no secrets."

Captain Mask hesitated a few moments, feeling that he had to deal with a superior man, and he then waved his hand to his followers. They all arose and left the apartment on the instant.

CHAPTER IV.—A Strange Freak.

When Captain Mask was left alone with his prisoner, the latter addressed the outlaw in candid tones, saying:

"I have confessed that I came here to spy on you, and I know that you will put me to death. Will you not satisfy the curiosity of a man who is on the verge of the grave by answering me a few questions?"

"Let us hear your questions."

"In the first place," said Jacot, "I would like to see the face of the man who is able to overpower me."

"Were you never overpowered before?"

"You will never behold my face. You say you served the emperor for fifteen years. Then why are you engaged with his enemies now?"

"I am a police officer, and I obey the commands of my chief. It may not avail me to tell you that I deplore the defeat of the great emperor, and that I would willingly die to see him restored to France again."

"Were you not aware that the outlaws of Vindy Forest were partisans of the exiled emperor?"

"It was so reported to me."

"You are but wasting words. You have confessed that you came here to spy on the Free Riders of Vindy Forest, and that is enough for us. You will suffer death in half an hour."

The detective pondered a few moments and then inquired in calm tones:

"Will the authorities at Marseilles become informed of my fate?"

"They will know that you have failed when you will not appear again, I presume."

"Would you permit me to write a few lines to the only person on earth I care for?"

"Who is that person?"

"My daughter."

"Where is your daughter?"

"She is in Marseilles, where she is stopping as a guest at the house of M. Morand, the merchant."

"Has she a mother?"

"Her mother is dead, and when I am gone she will not have a protector in the world."

The strange leader of the outlaws turned abruptly away from the prisoner, saying:

"I will see you in a few moments again."

On hastening into another apartment, Captain Mask drew Claude Morand aside and asked:

"Has your father a guest stopping at his house in Marseilles at present?"

"Yes, captain. Pauline Jacot, who has been my sister's companion at school, is our guest at present."

"Is she a worthy person?"

"She is an angel! She is as beautiful as a grand picture, and as innocent as a babe."

The masked leader did not wait to hear any more, as he turned abruptly and hastened back to the prisoner again, saying:

"M. Jacot, I will release you on one condition."

"What is that condition?"

"You will pledge yourself never to engage against us again, and you will give us security for keeping your promise."

"What security can I give?"

"Your daughter."

"My daughter!" gasped the detective, in startled tones. "I do not understand you, sir."

"My proposal is plain enough. I will release you on the instant if you will give me your solemn promise never to engage against the Free Riders of Vindy again, and as a guarantee of your faith you will place your daughter in our hands as a hostage."

"Place my dear daughter in the hands of the outlaws of Vindy! Never! I would die a thousand deaths first!"

"What do you fear? Think you not that your daughter would be safe with the Free Riders of Vindy?"

The detective did not reply, as he feared to give further offense to the leader of the outlaws. Without a moment's hesitation Captain Mask drew a knife from under his cloak and advanced to the detective, saying in more gentle tones:

"I will show you that your daughter may be safe in our hands."

The strange being then cut the cords that bound the prisoner's limbs. Then, taking him by the arm, he led him into the apartment where Josephine Morand was still reclining on a sofa, in apparent peace and comfort. Josephine Morand stared at the detective for a moment, and then arose from the sofa to salute him, saying with a smile:

"You see I am here, Mr. Jacot, and I must say that I am surprised to see you here."

Captain Mask then addressed the young lady, pointing to the detective, as he said:

"Will you be kind enough to tell this gentleman that you came here of your own free will?"

"Most assuredly I did."

Captain Mask bowed to the young lady, and taking the detective's arm again he led them from the apartment, saying in his gruff tones:

"I trust you are now satisfied, sir, that your daughter would be safe here as a companion of her old friend."

The detective answered without the slightest hesitation:

"I am satisfied, sir. My daughter will be delighted to bear the young lady's company as long as you please."

Having bandaged the man's eyes, the leader of the outlaws led him out of the apartment and then along a dark passage into the open air. Placing him before him on the strong horse, the strange being then started the animal through the forest, and when the bandage was removed again the detective found himself in front of the hut.

"Remember your promise, and I will expect your daughter here at the hut at ten o'clock to-morrow night."

"She will be here," cried the detective, as he stared after the strange being.

On hastening into his hut, Jacot made a few hasty preparations, and then started out for Marseilles. After consulting with his daughter, who readily entered into the scheme, the detective hastened to the mayor of the city, and announced that he considered it impossible for him to make any headway in suppressing the outlaws, declaring at the same time that he was about to return to Paris. On the same day the citizens of Marseilles were startled by the report that Josephine Morand had been borne away from the castle of Vindy by the outlaws of the forest while the wedding feast was taking place on the previous night. Strong parties of soldiers were sent out to scour the forest, Count Wilburt and his followers searched the country in every direction, and messengers were sent to the neighboring towns and villages, but no tidings of the missing bride could be obtained. About half-past nine o'clock on the following night a young lad, dressed as a common peasant, entered the hut at the edge of the forest, accompanied by a small dog. Before entering the hut the young lad looked eagerly around, speaking to the little dog in a low voice at the same time. Having satisfied himself on entering the hut that no spy was in the neighborhood, the lad raised his voice aloud, saying:

"All is well, sir."

A voice from under the floor at once answered:

"Well it is, Pauline. Did you meet anyone on your way here?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"Have you any alarm as to the result of the adventure before you, my daughter?"

"Not the slightest. In good truth, I will only be delighted to encounter this famous outlaw of the forest, and I anticipate much pleasure in the adventure."

At that moment the little dog uttered a low growl, and retreated to the side of his young mistress, wagging his tail in a vigorous manner.

"So there is someone coming, Bravo?"

The words were scarcely uttered when the galloping of a horse was heard on the greensward on the edge of the forest, and a rider soon after drew up in front of the hut, crying:

"Who is in there?"

The disguised girl advanced to the door on the instant, crying:

"A friend. Will you not dismount and enter, sir? I am the person you seek, I think."

The rider stared through his hood at the boyish figure, and then sprang from his steed, crying:

"Are you Pauline Jacot?"

"That is my name, sir. Father thought it best that I should come here in this disguise."

"You must be a brave girl. Do you not fear to trust yourself to the outlaws of the forest?"

"Why should I fear? If my friend, Josephine Morand, seeks shelter with you from a hateful husband, why should I fear to share her refuge with her?"

"I understand that your father has gone to Paris?"

"Yes, he left Marseilles to-day, after he had instructed me about finding this hut."

"Then you are prepared to accompany me?"

"On the instant."

The young leader then drew forth a bandage and placed it on the eyes of the young girl as he remarked, in rather merry tones:

"As you are not sworn into our band yet this precaution is necessary."

Without more ado the masked leader lifted the young girl in his strong arms, bore her from the hut, and placed her on the horse's back. Then springing up behind her he held her in a courteous manner, as he remarked:

"Now we will away to the home of the outlaws. What is the trouble with you, my brave horse?"

When the rider urged on the powerful gray horse the animal kicked and reared in the most unusual manner, and refused to proceed on his journey. Glancing backward on the instant Captain Mask perceived the cause of the trouble. The little dog had sprung up behind him on the horse. Seizing the little animal by the neck, Captain Mask placed him inside the folds of his cloak as he said to the young girl:

"Is this your dog?"

"Oh, yes. Bravo will not leave me on any account, and I trust he will not annoy you."

The horse then dashed through the wood, while the masked leader held the dog under his cloak. When the bandage was removed from the young girl's eyes again, she found herself in the elegant apartment to which Josephine Morand had been conducted, and the merchant's daughter was there to receive her with open arms.

CHAPTER V.—Why Did He Wear the Steel Mask?

Only four persons in Vindy Castle were aware that the deserted wing of the old building was inhabited by the mysterious being who wore the steel mask. About eighteen years before the time when Count Wilburt proposed to take a second wife a son was born to him. On the night after the birth of that son, the Countess of Vindy died, and it was reported that her babe was buried at the same time. Count Wilburt then left his castle and hastened to Paris, taking his son Henry, who was four years old at the time, and his little daughter with him. The castle was left in charge of an old woman named Margot, who had acted as nurse in the family for some years. After a long absence in Paris, Count Wilburt returned to his castle again with his two children, Henry Wilburt being a lively lad of eighteen at the time, while his sister was just blooming into womanhood. The young lad noticed that the deserted wing of the building was never visited by anyone except old Margot, and he also noticed that she paid sly visits there at the dead hour of the night. One evening while the old woman was indulging in a nap after her supper, Henry stole into her private room, secured the keys, and then hastened away on his tour of inspection. Having secured a lantern, the inquisitive lad searched through all the passages until he came to the iron door with the sliding panel.

Although he moved with great caution his footsteps were heard by the person inside the apartment, as the panel was pushed back and a hoarse voice fell on his ear, saying:

"You are early to-night, Margot."

Henry was a little startled on hearing the rough voice, and he was still more surprised when he beheld a pair of flashing eyes peering out of the loophole from behind the bright steel mask.

The wearer of the mask uttered an exclamation of surprise on perceiving the lad, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"I am Henry Wilburt. Who are you?"

"Seek not to know me, but go your way. How is it that you are here instead of old Margot?"

The words were scarcely uttered when old Margot herself appeared on the scene in a furious rage, and seizing Henry she dragged him away from the iron door, crying:

"You young wretch, how dare you steal my keys and intrude here? If your father knew this you would share the fate of the unfortunate being."

Young Wilburt was a brave youth, and he was not at all afraid of the masculine old Margot.

"I will not leave here until you tell me who is that person in there. If you lay hands on me again, you old wretch, I will punish you as you deserve."

"Oh, Master Henry, do you seek my ruin and your own destruction? If the count knew that you were here he would be furious."

"It will be your own fault if my father knows anything about my adventure; but you must tell me about the prisoner confined in there, or I will denounce you and him to the world at large."

"Margot, Margot," cried the voice from the iron door, "allow me to speak to the youth, and I will satisfy him."

Henry darted back to the door, crying:

"That is best. Tell me who you are, and if you desire it I swear to you that I will keep old Margot's secret."

"I am your brother," was the response, in subdued and plaintive tones.

"My brother! That must be a mistake, as I have no brother living."

Perceiving that the mischief was done, old Margot hastened to make an explanation. Henry was then informed that the unfortunate being inside was his younger brother, and that he had been confined in the apartments inside of the iron door since his earliest childhood. The astonished lad was also informed that the count and the old nurse alone were aware of the existence of the unfortunate being, who was supposed to have been buried with his mother soon after his birth. He was also informed that his brother had worn a steel mask from his childhood; that his father had never beheld him since the night of his birth, and that no human being except the nurse had seen the face under the mask since its owner was one day old. As Henry Wilburt was an affectionate lad, he became deeply attached to his unfortunate brother. Henry Wilburt could not learn the cause of his solitary brother wearing a steel mask at all times, as both the nurse and the mysterious being himself would not give him any information on that point. After that night, when he solemnly pledged himself to keep the

secret, the young lad was often permitted to pay stolen visits to his brother, but he was never admitted inside the iron door. When Henry Wilburt volunteered to serve as a soldier under the banner of the great Napoleon his father became fearfully enraged at him, as the count was a member of a secret league opposed to the emperor, while pretending to countenance his reign.

On the return of the young man from the battle of Waterloo, he discovered that his proud and ambitious sister was intriguing against him with her father, and the young soldier sought the advice of the masked prisoner. Henry then found that his unfortunate brother possessed information and a secret power that enabled him to aid his handsome relative against the intrigues of his father and sister. The proposed marriage of old Count Wilburt with the rich merchant's daughter was brought about by Isabel Wilburt out of pure hatred for her brother, as she was well aware that Henry and Josephine Morand were deeply attached to each other. Up to the night of the wedding feast the young soldier never suspected that his solitary brother ventured forth from the castle, but he then learned that the masked youth had been in the habit of frequenting the Forest of Vindy for years past. About ten o'clock on the night after the wedding feast, Count Wilburt and his daughter were seated in a private apartment of the castle, when a male servant entered and handed a note to his master, saying:

"The bearer is at the outer gate awaiting an answer, sir."

Count Wilburt read the note and then turned to the man as he said, in somewhat excited tones: "Show the bearer in at once."

The young woman retired, and a tall man, wearing a full gray beard and dressed in the tattered garments of an old soldier, was ushered into the count's presence. The stranger advanced, as if fearing to speak aloud, and whispered into the ear of the count:

"I saw your promised bride last night after she was taken from the castle."

"Are you M. Jacot?"

"Yes, I am the agent from Paris."

"Where did you see the young lady last night?"

"In the retreat of the outlaws in the forest."

"It is impossible. If you were in the retreat of the outlaws, sir, you would not be alive now to give me the information."

"It is true, nevertheless. Moreover, I encountered the person who bore your promised bride away."

"Who was it?" demanded the count, in imperious tones.

"I will be better able to answer the question, Count Wilburt, if you will give me a little information."

"What information do you seek?"

"I would like to know if you are acquainted with anyone in this vicinity who is in the habit of wearing a bright steel mask on his face?"

"What do you mean by such a question, sir?"

"My meaning should be plain enough, Count Wilburt. The person who bore your promised bride away, and who made me a prisoner on the same night, wore a bright steel mask on his face which concealed his features. I have reason to know that the person I allude to is the leader of

the Free Riders of Vindy Forest, and that he is on excellent terms with your promised bride."

"Can you inform me if the leader of the outlaws is abroad to-night?"

The detective at once responded:

"I am certain that he rode through the Forest of Vindy a very short time ago."

"What direction was he taking at the time?"

"He was riding toward Marseilles, count, and away from this vicinity."

The excited count then excused himself again and hastened out into the hallway. Old Margot was seated in her private room when her master appeared before her with a very flushed countenance, saying:

"You wicked old wretch, have you betrayed me?"

"How have I betrayed you, sir count?"

"That wretched boy! I have been informed that he is abroad to-night in the forest."

"That is impossible, Count Wilburt, as I can soon prove, if you will follow me."

"That is what I propose," answered the excited man, as he followed the old woman out of the room.

When they reached the iron door the old woman knocked thereon, and the masked face soon appeared at the panel, while the gruff voice inside demanded:

"Why are you here again to-night, Margot?"

The count stared at the steel mask for a few moments as he stood behind the old woman, and then a cold shudder passed over his frame while he turned away, muttering:

"The agent is mistaken, or else the outlaw has by chance adopted the disguise worn by the wretched boy."

Count Wilburt then hastened back to the detective, with whom he held a long conversation. Jacot left the castle soon after, and made his way toward the hut in the forest. The cunning man was about entering the hut when a pair of strong arms were flung around him, and he was borne to the ground with great force. Before the detective could realize who had assaulted him his arms were secured behind him, and he was flung on the powerful gray horse, which was standing under a tree behind the hut. His captor was about placing a bandage on the detective's eyes, when the latter caught a glimpse of the steel mask under the black hood and he said to himself:

"I knew I could not be mistaken. Alas, I cannot expect any mercy now."

CHAPTER VI.—Captain Mask and the Maiden.

About the time when Captain Mask was bearing Jacot through the wood as a prisoner for the second time, his young daughter and Josephine Morand were seated in the outlaw's retreat and conversing in the most confidential manner. The little dog, Bravo, was frisking around his young mistress in the elegant apartment, while she kept chatting away with Josephine.

"And so you were surprised to see me here in this garb, dear friend," said the detective's daughter, as she glanced down at her male costume.

"Why should I not be surprised, Pauline?" was the candid reply. "I was almost surprised to find myself here even, when I knew what I fled from."

"Oh, you are safe, Josephine, because this dreadful Captain Mask must be a dear friend of the brave young man you love, but how different it is with me."

"But you are with me and you will be safe, also, Pauline, I can assure you."

"I am not sure of that. You will understand that my father is a government officer, and that he is sworn to obey the minister of police. He was captured last night, as I said before, by this terrible and mysterious Captain Mask. The strange outlaw then learned that he had a young daughter, depending on him, and he spared his life on condition that he would send me here as a hostage."

"I do not see what you have to fear, Pauline. If your father keeps his pledge, and does not act against the outlaws of Vindy again, I am certain that you will be safe here."

"Ah, there is the trouble. My father is very thankful to the mysterious outlaw for sparing his life, and he has no desire to act against him or his companions again, but he is not his own master, you know. It is just possible that he may be ordered to come in quest of the outlaws again, and then you may imagine what his fate and mine would be if he is detected by them."

"Did your father give you to understand that he would come back here again in quest of the outlaws if ordered?"

"Oh, no, no! He informed the authorities at Marseilles that he found it impossible to get on the track of the Free Riders of Vindy, and he left for Paris to-day."

Pauline Jacot uttered the last words in a loud shrill voice, as if she desired to have the information conveyed to others outside the apartment. The door was flung open on the instant, and Captain Mask strode into the room with the hood of his cloak drawn over his steel-covered face.

"Are you certain that your father returned to Paris to-day, young lady?" he asked the detective's daughter.

"Oh, yes, sir. I saw him going away in the public coach after he had given me instructions about finding the hut in the wood."

"Did you mention to anyone in Marseilles that you were coming out to the retreat of the outlaws of Vindy?"

"Oh, certainly not, sir. My dear father impressed on me that I must not speak on the subject to anyone, and I have been accustomed from childhood to follow his instructions implicitly."

"Have you not also been accustomed, young lady, to aid your father in hunting down offenders against the government?"

"Oh, no, sir. My friend here can inform you that I have been at boarding-school with her for the last two years, and I can assure you that I have always led a very retired life."

And the clever young girl appeared to tremble and shiver at the thought of being engaged in any such dangerous scheme. Captain Mask started to retire, but before reaching the door turned abruptly and addressed Josephine Morand, saying:

"Young lady, will you be prepared for the journey to the frontier with your friend?"

"I will be ready at any moment, Captain Mask. But is it necessary that we must cross the frontier into Spain?"

"It is necessary, young lady. As you are under age, a marriage in France, without the consent of your father, would not be legal. If you care to wed the man you love you must fly to Spain with him?"

"I would fly to the end of the world with him," answered Josephine, "and I will be ready at any moment."

"Dear me," said the innocent Pauline, "how delightful it must be to fly to Spain with your lover, and how I do wish that I was flying with you."

Captain Mask turned at once to the detective's young daughter as he responded:

"Young lady, you will accompany Miss Morand to Spain."

The masked man then left the apartment, while the wily young girl turned to Josephine, saying:

"Oh, this is delightful. You know I have always longed to visit Spain, and I can act as your bridesmaid! Mercy on me, it is my father!"

The last exclamation was caused by the sudden entrance of the masked leader and the detective, the latter casting a warning glance at his young daughter as he was led forward.

"Oh, father, father, why are you here? What has brought you back again, when I saw you leaving for Paris?"

"I was on my way to Paris, dear Pauline, when I met a messenger from that city who bore an order from the minister of police urging me to return on an unpleasant mission. I obeyed and I am lost. I do not care for myself, but I tremble for you."

"Do not tremble for your daughter," said Captain Mask. "If she is innocent she will not suffer. Without doubt, you have broken your solemn pledge to me, and you must die. The Free Riders of Vindy Forest seldom pardon a spy even once, a confirmed traitor never."

Pauline Jacot flung herself on the floor before the masked leader, and grasped his hand, as she pleaded forth in tremulous tones:

"Oh, good, dear outlaw, do not slay my beloved father, and I will be your slave for life. Dear Josephine, plead with me, I implore you. Beg of him to spare my dear father. Did I not tell you that he may be compelled to obey the order of his chief or die the death of a traitor?"

"That is the truth," groaned the detective. "I had no choice between imprisonment and death at the hands of the government, or a return here in quest of the outlaws."

Captain Mask turned fiercely on the detective as he demanded in savage tones:

"You perjured wretch, were you ordered to hasten to Vindy Castle to-night, and there intrigue with Count Wilburt for the destruction of his own son? Were you ordered to pry into family secret affairs, in order to aid you in carrying out your project against those who spared your life when you were at their mercy? Does not Count Wilburt await your signal this very moment in order to sally out with the troops secreted in the castle, so that he may crush the

outlaws of Vindy Forest and secure the rich bride who fled from him in disgust?"

"I was but obeying the instructions I had received from the minister of police in Paris by the messenger I met on the road."

"Perfidious liar, did the minister of police instruct you to send your own innocent daughter here to assist you in your base intrigues?"

"My dear child has nothing to do with my acts. When I sent her to you in good faith as a hostage I was determined on returning to Paris, and I even resolved to throw up my position if ordered back here again."

Another savage growl burst from the outlaw, and he cried:

"Bah! Were you not concealed in the pit under the hut when I bore away your daughter to-night? Wretch that you are, you did not hesitate to send your own child into the den of the outlaws, in the hope of being able to track her here with the soldiers, through the assistance of that little dog there. M. Jacot, you may be a very brilliant man while dealing with the criminals of Paris, but you are only a fool with the outlaws of Vindy. You are convicted of double treachery, and you must die. Bid your daughter farewell forever."

"Oh, mercy—mercy, good outlaw! Spare my father's life, and we will be your slaves. Dear father, will you not join the brave band if they spare your life?"

"Most willingly, child."

"I will take you at your word, Jacot. While I am aware that it is your desire to join my band in order to betray us, I will place you in such a position that I can defy you to use treachery," said the outlaw.

"I have hated and despised the government since the restoration and the banishment of the adored emperor, and I have only waited a chance to throw up my position. If you will spare my life again, name the deed you would have me commit, and I will obey you."

"I will name the deed. If you would become one of the Free Riders of Vindy Forest, you will slay one of their greatest enemies in a public manner with your own hand."

"Who is that enemy?"

"Count Wilburt of Vindy Castle."

"Count Wilburt of Vindy Castle!" gasped the detective, while Josephine Morand uttered a cry of dismay at the same moment.

"I have mentioned the name of the man whom I desire you to slay. It will not be necessary for you to assail him in the presence of a hundred witnesses, but you must dispatch him in such a manner as to leave no doubt that you were his executioner."

The detective groaned aloud as he responded:

"The option is terrible, but I am compelled to save my life for my daughter's sake. As Count Wilburt is a cruel father and an enemy of our beloved emperor, I swear that I will slay him this very night, if it is in my power."

In less than ten minutes after Captain Mask was dashing through the forest again on his powerful gray horse, and the blindfolded detective was stretched across the animal in front of him. On reaching the edge of the wood the outlaw withdrew the bandage from Jacot's eyes and pointed toward the Castle of Vindy as he said:

"Go your way now, and remember that your beloved daughter is in my power if you fail in keeping your pledge to me."

The detective then hastened away toward the castle as he muttered to himself:

"What a strange being! Can it be possible that he is the person I suspect, and that he sends me to slay his own father in cold blood?"

CHAPTER VII.—Jacot Plays Another Game.

While hastening across the fields toward the castle he cast his eye back, and he saw that Captain Mask was riding after him at a distance, with the evident intention of watching his movements. As Jacot kept on his course he conceived the idea of trying another experiment with the strong man who had twice overpowered him. He had no weapons with him at the time, or he would have turned and ventured on another assault, so he kept on his way, muttering:

"If he will but venture close to the castle we may find some horses in the stable that may run as fast as that powerful gray."

The outlaw did venture close to the castle, as the detective was about entering the main gate when the rider and steed suddenly disappeared behind one of the walls. Being somewhat surprised at the movement, Jacot darted back to the spot from whence the masked rider had disappeared, but when he glanced along the walls he could not see anything of either of them. Count Wilburt had not retired to rest, and he was watching at one of the windows for a signal from the forest when he perceived the detective and the rider approaching the castle. Hastening down into the court-yard, the count received his visitor as he demanded, in cautious tones:

"What intelligence do you bring now?"

"None," was the loud response.

Jacot then cast a warning glance at the count, and drew him into a doorway as he whispered to him:

"Be cautious, count. Even your very stone walls have ears."

"What do you mean, sir?"

Casting a cautious look around the detective hastened to inform Count Wilburt of his last adventure, and he concluded by saying:

"You now see how careful we must be, count. Even as we speak this human fiend may be watching us from a secret spyhole."

"Come with me, and I will lead you to a place where we cannot be either seen or overheard by any treacherous spy."

The count led the way in the darkness, until they reached the deserted wing of the castle where the unfortunate prisoner had been so long confined. Drawing a private key from his pocket, Count Wilburt opened the iron door in the most stealthy manner as he whispered to the detective:

"I wish to convince you that your suspicions are not correct. I am convinced that my wretched son has never left those walls since the day of his birth."

The count had entered the passage and closed the iron door after him as the detective responded in the same low key:

"I may be mistaken, count. Yet is it not

strange that the outlaw leader should wear a steel mask also?"

"The coincidence is strange, and I have been pondering over it since you informed me of the fact to-night."

"And what have your ponderings led to, sir?"

Count Wilburt gnashed his teeth ere he hissed forth:

"I believe that my wretched son Henry is the leader of the outlaws. You know that he served under the usurper Napoleon against my will. He was in love with the young lady who is my promised bride, and I believe that he instigated the plot for bearing her away to the outlaw's retreat."

The count drew the detective toward the door of the apartment where the prisoner was confined, as he responded in a whisper:

"I will convince you that the wretched prisoner is not the leader of the outlaw."

When they reached the door the count drew forth another key, and they gained admittance into the apartment without making the least noise. A small lamp was suspended from the ceiling, and by the light therefrom the two men could perceive a boyish form with a steel mask on his head lying on a bed in the large, gloomy room. Before looking at the sleeper the detective cast his eyes at the only small window to be seen, and he noticed that it was secured by strong iron bars. Motioning the detective to draw near the bed, Count Wilburt pointed to the sleeper as he whispered:

"You see that there can be no mistake."

Before the detective could respond the masked figure started up in the bed and stared at the intruders as he growled forth:

"Who are you and what do you seek here? Margot, Margot, who are those strangers?"

And the strange being crouched down on the bed again, covering his mask with a quilt, after the manner of a terrified child on being alarmed at night. A hoarse cry was heard at the moment, and old Margot burst into the apartment in great terror, as she exclaimed:

"Mercy on me, count, what do you seek here?"

The wretched being on the bed sprang up on the instant, and bent his fiery glances on Count Wilburt, as he exclaimed, in guttural tones:

"Is that Count Wilburt? Is that the man who has confined me in this living tomb during my lifetime?"

Old Margot sprang to the side of the bed and clasped her arms around the masked youth, as she cried:

"Peace, peace, good Joseph. Have I not taught you that it is wise to bear your sufferings?"

Count Wilburt advanced toward the bed as he exclaimed:

"Wretched boy, I did but confine you here for your own happiness. Margot, I would speak to you outside, and you will come with me at once."

Count Wilburt retreated toward the door, and the obedient old woman followed him, but the suspicious detective lingered by the bedside, with his keen eyes fixed on the youth, who was again enveloped in the bed-clothes. When old Margot reached the door she turned and looked at the detective, as she cried aloud:

"Count Wilburt, will you allow a stranger to remain in this apartment?"

"Such are my orders, Margot."

The masked youth sprang from the bed and flung himself on the detective with great ferocity, as he cried:

"I will have no spies here on me. Away with you, dog, or I will tear you limb from limb."

Old Margot rushed between them and seized the youth as she cried in imploring tones:

"Oh, Joseph, my son, do not commit murder. Man, get out the door, or he will kill you, as he has the strength of a lion when aroused to anger."

Count Wilburt dragged the detective out of the room and locked the iron door on the enraged youth and old Margot, as he cried:

"He is a perfect savage, and I will never venture into his presence again."

"The secret is out. That youth is the leader of the outlaws, as it is impossible for two such strong men to exist in this neighborhood," said the detective.

A hoarse mocking laugh was heard at the end of the passage at the moment, while a bright light glared up at the same time, and the two men turned to behold the masked outlaw of the forest standing before them as he exclaimed, in jeering tones:

"You are mistaken, wise Jacot. Open the panel and you will see Count Wilburt's son in his life prison, while here I stand as free as the birds in the forest."

CHAPTER VIII.—Which Was the Outlaw?

Great was the surprise of Count Wilburt at the appearance of the masked man at the end of the passage, yet greater still was the consternation of Jacot, who was not in the habit of losing his presence of mind. Recovering a little from his surprise, and still keeping his eyes fixed on the person at the end of the passage, Jacot pushed aside the panels and glared into the room. Then he could plainly see the old nurse seated on the bedside beside the unfortunate youth, and the rough woman appeared to be in the act of consoling him at the moment, as her arms were twined around his waist, while she spoke aloud, saying:

"Dear, good Henry, why are you so rude now, when you were always so gentle and patient?"

The youth made an impatient reply, which Jacot did not catch at the moment. Advancing a few steps toward the intruder at the end of the passage, and drawing his sword at the same time, the count cried in agitated tones:

"Who are you that thus dares to enter the Castle of Vindy by stealth?"

"Who am I, Count Wilburt? Well, that man behind you may tell you that I am known as the outlaw of the forest. Why do I intrude here? I will answer you in a few words. I am here to baffle you in your vile schemes against your noble son Henry."

Count Wilburt was gradually advancing, or rather gliding along the passage, until he was within about six feet of the speaker, when he suddenly sprang forward and made a thrust at him with his sword, crying:

"Death to the outlaw."

The masked man did not flinch an inch from

the sudden assault, but he did make a peculiar movement with his long arms, and the next instant the sword was torn from the count's grasp. Captain Mask then took the count's sword and broke it across his knee, flinging the pieces to its owner as he cried:

"You have worn it in disgrace long enough, sir count. Get a new one and use it in a better cause, or your gallant son will soon be master of Vindy Castle."

The noise of the struggle, as well as the loud voices, attracted the attention of the prisoner, and his bright mask soon appeared at the panel while his gruff voice rang out, crying:

"Is that you, Henry?"

Before he could receive an answer old Margot dragged him away with gentle force, and closed the panel, crying:

"Retire, Count Wilburt, or I will not answer for the youth, as he has a bad strain on him to-night."

Count Wilburt cast a glance along the dark passage as he hastened to open the door, and he then noticed that his strange assailant had disappeared. Jacot had now recovered also, and he was standing beside the count at the iron door, gasping forth in tremulous tones:

"We are dealing with a fiend, Count Wilburt, and I pray that you will retire from hence at once."

Count Wilburt was a bold, stubborn man, and, as he flung open the iron door, he cried:

"I will solve this mystery to-night if it cost me my life! Follow me, Jacot!"

He then sprang into the room, followed by the detective, and the iron door was closed and locked again, while the count cried:

"The fiend cannot follow us in here. Why is the lamp out, Margot?"

The old woman was in a state of feverish excitement at the moment, and she replied:

"How can I tell, count? The lamp was burning but a moment ago."

"And it is burning now again!" cried a gruff voice at the end of the room. "Count Wilburt, you will not solve the mystery to-night."

A bright light did glare up in the room at the moment, while the two men and old Margot uttered cries of consternation. Standing by the bed, with their hands clasped together, were two persons exactly similar in dress and appearance, and with their bright masks gleaming forth from under the hoods of their large cloaks. Before the spectators could recover from their surprise the two figures advanced toward them, while a gruff voice rang out, crying:

"Count Wilburt, you will not solve the mystery to-night, and the agent from Paris will not be any wiser. Can you now say which of us is the outlaw of Vindy Forest?"

The two men stared at the masked figures before them in utter confusion, and the count then cast his eyes around the room as he asked:

"Where is the unfortunate prisoner?"

One of the masked figures advanced a step, as he replied:

"I am your prisoner, Count Wilburt. I am the son whom you have doomed to eternal solitude."

The other masked person shook the hand he held as he cried, in pathetic tones:

"But you will not be a prisoner after tonight, dear friend, as I am here to rescue you and to do you justice."

The count put on an air of bravado, as he demanded in insolent tones:

"What is your pleasure with me, sir outlaw? Which of you am I to address as the leader of the Free Riders of Vindy Forest?"

The two men were still clasping hands as one of them replied:

"You will address each of us in turn, as hereafter we will act as one. You ask us what we demand of you, sir count, and we will answer. We demand that you act as becomes a gentleman, a French nobleman, and a father."

A mocking smile appeared on Count Wilburt's face, as he asked, in jeering tones:

"Pray teach me first as to my duties as a gentleman."

"You know your duties," answered the other of the masked men. "Sneers and defiances will not avail you now. As a gentleman and a noble of France you should act in honor to all men, high or low."

"And wherein have I failed, sir outlaw?"

"Do you dare deny, Count Wilburt, that you conspired with your own vain daughter to crush your gallant son, Henry? Did you not know that he was engaged to Josephine Morand, and that you and your daughter plotted his destruction, out of pure malice and hatred?"

Count Wilburt shrugged his shoulders as he answered in defiant tones:

"I will not waste words with such wretches as you are, and I will only say that I defy you to the death."

The two strange beings sprang forward suddenly as if actuated by a single impulse, and Count Wilburt was seized and borne to the ground, while one of them cried:

"Then we will compel you to do justice. We will serve you as you would serve your own son, and your wicked daughter will share your fate."

Having seized the man they lifted him in their arms and placed him on the bed. The count was a child. Jacot stood trembling near the door as he saw the two powerful beings placing the count on the bed and binding his arms and feet without much ceremony. One of the masked men stood guard over the prisoner while the other advanced to the detective, saying:

"Now, Jacot, I will settle with you."

"You can but put me to death."

"Do you admit that you have deserved your fate for your treachery?"

"What is the use of argument now? According to your code I have deserved my fate. My dear daughter, however, is not guilty with me."

"It is of your daughter that I wish to speak. You can save her life and your own if you will."

"How may that be?"

"Let her become my bride."

"My child your wife! Certainly you must be jesting with me, sir."

"I am not jesting, M. Jacot. Why should not the outlaw of Vindy Forest secure a fair bride?"

"Why should the outlaw of Vindy Forest wear a steel mask on his face at all times? Why should he not court a fair bride with his face exposed?"

"The outlaw of the forest courts with his

tongue and not with his face. I will pay my addresses to your fair daughter, and I warrant you that she will not refuse to become my bride. In the meantime, I will be compelled to prove to you that I am still your master."

As the strange being uttered the last words he flung himself on the detective and bore him to the floor, while he cried aloud:

"In with you, friends, and secure your prisoners."

The iron door was burst in on the moment and a dozen armed men sprang to secure the two prisoners, while old Margot cried in trembling tones:

"Mercy on me, what fate will be mine?"

One of the strange beings pointed to the open door as he replied in softened tones:

"You will retire, Margot, and you will keep silent as to what you have seen to-night. Hereafter you will not be compelled to wait on the unfortunate youth, who will never forget your kind attention to him."

When old Margot retired one of the masked men approached Count Wilburt, saying:

"My friends will now bear you away from your castle, while I go to treat with your proud daughter."

CHAPTER IX.—Captain Mask and the Proud Beauty.

Proud Isabel Wilburt was not asleep while the masked men were dealing with her father. The ambitious young woman was seated in her own apartment, pondering over the strange events recently transpiring in the castle, while she waited eagerly for the presence of the count and the detective. The proud beauty pretended to despise Claude Morand, the gallant young soldier, when she really adored him. Knowing that the young soldier was deeply attached to her, she treated him with the utmost contempt for the time, feeling assured that he would fall at her feet when the vile schemes were accomplished.

While pretending to forward her father's interests by marriage with the rich merchant's daughter, Isabel Wilburt was intriguing for the possession of the young girl and her own noble brother at the same time. With Henry Wilburt and Josephine Morand removed from her path, the ambitious daughter of the castle would accept Claude Morand as her husband, and she would then inherit all the wealth of the old merchant as well as her own father's estate. And thus it was that the wicked young woman conspired with the count, while she was secretly planning the destruction of his promised bride. The young woman knew that the unfortunate youth in the deserted tower was her own brother, and that he was suspected by the detective of being the mysterious outlaw of Vindy Forest. Isabel Wilburt did not share in that suspicion, yet she was anxious that the unhappy youth should be removed forever, as she had a dim presentiment that he might yet prove a thorn in her ambitious path. She was therefore anxious to get the result of the visit of the two men to the detective's wing that night. Becoming impatient at the delay, the ambitious creature arose from

her chair and paced the room, as she muttered aloud:

"What can keep them so long?"

A slight movement took place behind her at the moment, and before she could turn her head a gruff voice answered:

"I will answer you, lady."

Isabel Wilburt was not a timid woman, yet she uttered a slight scream as she turned and beheld a boyish figure, with a steel mask over his face, standing before her. Starting back a little, and grasping the handle of a dagger, she demanded:

"Why are you here, and who are you?"

The masked leader held up his hand in a warning manner as he replied, in his gruffest tones:

"I am here to warn you, Isabel Wilburt, and I am known as Captain Mask."

The young woman was startled and very much alarmed at the sudden appearance of the outlaw in her own private apartment, but she put on a dignified air as she demanded, in stern tones:

"How dare you intrude on me in this manner? If you are the outlaw of the forest, you have no power in this castle."

"You are mistaken, lady, as my presence here should warn you that I have power in the Castle of Vindy. I am now here to inform you that your father and M. Jacot are my prisoners and that I have come to deal with you as you deserve."

The young woman drew back as if to spring to the door and call for aid, displaying her dagger at the same moment. Captain Mask made a sudden spring forward and seized the young woman by the arms, forcing the dagger from her grasp at the same time, as he hissed forth:

"Be silent, or I will muzzle you. I am not here to injure you at present, if you will heed my advice."

Isabel Wilburt trembled for the first time in her life as she felt the iron grasp of the outlaw on her arms, and she gasped forth:

"What do you seek with me?"

"Justice and retribution," was the stern reply. "I am your brother's friend, and I am aware of your plot against him."

The young woman made an effort to call out for aid, but Captain Mask's hand was on her mouth on the instant while he continued:

"You are powerless in my hands, even though the castle be filled with soldiers. If you agree and swear to follow my advice I will release you. If you refuse, I will bear you away with me in confinement with your father. What is your answer, Isabel Wilburt?"

The proud young woman shook her head in an indignant manner, as she replied:

"I will make no compact with such a wretch as you. You may slay me, but you will never subdue me. I defy you, base outlaw."

"Then we will tame you."

As Captain Mask spoke he clapped a gag on the mouth of the young woman, seized her in his powerful arms, and drew his large cloak over her as he bore her from the room. The outlaw had scarcely gained the hall outside with his captive when an imperious voice assailed him, crying:

"Who goes there?"

Lights flashed up at the same moment, and the outlaw saw that he was surrounded by soldiers.

Still clasping the young woman with his left arm, the masked man drew a sword from his side and made a dash at the officer in front of him, as he cried:

"Make way for the outlaw of Vindy."

The officer drew back a few steps, drawing his own weapon at the same moment, as he yelled:

"It is the masked outlaw of Vindy, and he bears the young lady of the castle away. Close in on him, soldiers, and disarm him."

Fully a dozen men flung themselves on the masked man, and he was compelled to release his grasp on Isabel Wilburt in order to struggle with his assailants. And fierce was the struggle that then ensued. Four of the soldiers had seized the outlaw ere he struck out with his long arms, stretching an assailant on the floor with every blow. At the second command of the officer, others flung themselves on the powerful youth, grasping him by the arms and legs and bearing him to the floor, while he kept struggling in a furious manner and uttering fierce growls the while. Twice did he fling his assailants away and regain his feet, while he endeavored to fight his way to the door leading up to the deserted wing. But the soldiers crowded on him thicker and faster, while the commander kept crying:

"Do not slay the wretch, as I have orders to take him alive if possible."

Isabel Wilburt had torn the gag from her mouth, and she slipped back to the side of the officer, as she cried:

"Yes, take him alive, and then hasten with me to the rescue of the count."

Captain Mask continued to struggle like a wild boar at bay, until he was borne to the floor for the third time, when he was eventually secured and surrounded by the soldiers in the broad hallway. Isabel Wilburt then turned to the officer in command, as she cried:

"My father is a prisoner in the deserted wing, and I pray that you will hasten to his rescue. Margot, Margot, you old wretch, where are you?"

The old woman had witnessed the terrible struggle from the stairway, and she now advanced to the young lady as she replied:

"I am here, my lady, and what do you seek at my hands?"

"The keys to the deserted wing. Hasten and open the door, you old wretch, or I will have you flayed alive."

Old Margot drew the keys from her pocket and flung them on the floor before the young lady, as she cried:

"There are the keys! I no longer serve in the Castle of Vindy."

The old woman then turned and fled up the stairs, as she cried aloud:

"A dark curse is on this house, and it will hang over it until her noble son is welcomed back again."

The young lady did not seem to notice old Margot as she seized the keys and hastened to open the door leading up into the deserted wing, while she cried to the officer:

"Colonel Folger, hasten up with me in force, and drag the vile prisoner with you."

The old colonel was the first to follow the young lady along the deserted passage, while his troops crowded after him, bearing lanterns and torches. When the young woman reached the

prisoner's door she hastened to open it as she cried to the officer:

"My father and another gentleman came up here not half an hour ago, and that wretch informed me that he had secured them as prisoners." As Isabel uttered the last words she flung open the door and the officer and his men rushed in. After casting one glance around, Colonel Folger turned to the young lady, crying:

"There is no one here at present, lady."

The prisoner was dragged in at the moment, when Isabel Wilburt sprang at him as she demanded, in furious tones:

"What have you done with my father, you savage wretch?"

The prisoner was then secured by strong cords, and he glared around at his foes through his steel mask as he grunted forth:

"Your father is my prisoner, and I defy you to touch a hair of my head."

"Remove that mask, and let us see who he is," cried Colonel Folger.

"No, no," screamed the young lady. "I beg that you will not remove the mask."

One of the soldiers was examining the steel mask at the moment, and he said to the colonel:

"Colonel, the mask seems to have been cast on the fellow's head, as we cannot perceive an opening."

A mocking laugh burst from the prisoner, and he cried, in jeering tones, as he turned to the young lady:

"Are you not anxious to see my face?"

The young woman drew back with a shudder and held her hand before her eyes, as she cried:

"No, no; in mercy, keep that face concealed forever, if you are the person I suspect."

"Whom do you suspect me to be?"

"The unfortunate being who was concealed in this apartment for so many years," answered the young lady.

The colonel advanced and confronted the prisoner at the moment, as he cried:

"Whoever he may be, young lady, I must place him in strict confinement for the present and hasten away in quest of the count. Can it be that your noble father is concealed in the castle?"

"Her noble father," cried the outlaw, "is on his way to the Forest of Vindy at present."

"That is true, Colonel Folger," said Jacot, who had just entered the apartment. "I was also captured by the outlaws of the forest, and I have been sent back here to plead with you for the release of their leader."

Colonel Folger drew himself up in a stiff manner as he responded:

"We cannot treat with the outlaws of the forest, but I would learn from you, sir, what they demand."

"They demand the instant release of their leader, colonel, and they declare that Count Wilburt will share his fate, whatever it may be."

The colonel pondered a few moments ere he addressed the government agent, saying:

"I am to suppose that you are free of the outlaws, M. Jacot, or are you sworn to return to them?"

"I am on parole, colonel, and I am pledged to return to them if I fail in my mission. Besides, my beloved daughter is in the hands of the outlaws, and I am anxious to return to her."

The prisoner burst out into a loud chuckle at the moment, and he then turned on Jacot, as he cried:

"Yes, and I am anxious to return to the forest to pay my addresses to my promised bride."

"Your promised bride!" screamed Isabel Wilburt. "You savage wretch, what woman would accept you as a husband?"

The prisoner chuckled again, as he replied in his jeering tones:

"May not my mask conceal a face that is fairer than your heart, young lady? If it does, M. Jacot's daughter will accept me as a husband while I still wear the mask, and you will be one of the witnesses of the ceremony."

"Never, you wretch!"

Colonel Folger here interfered, crying:

"A truce to this folly. I must hasten away with my troops to the rescue of the count, and the prisoner must be consigned to the dungeon. I will give strict orders to keep guard on him, and I warrant you that he will not escape. M. Jacot, you will accompany me to the forest and act as our guide."

The detective shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"I will accompany you to the forest, colonel, as I am pledged to return there, but I fear that my guiding will not avail you much."

"I will guide you to the forest," cried the prisoner, as they were about to drag him from the room.

"Down to the dungeon with him," cried the colonel, "and let a file of men keep guard outside the door."

A loud chuckle burst from the prisoner as they dragged him out into the passage, and he cried:

"I will be in the forest with you if a thousand men keep guard on the dungeon door. M. Jacot, remember that your daughter is to be my bride."

The detective did not reply to the prisoner, but turned to the officer as he said in whispered tones:

"He is a demon and he will fulfill his promise. Would that I had never beheld the forest of Vindy."

The stern officer cast a suspicious glance on the government agent as he demanded:

"Are you then afraid to proceed against the outlaws, and will I so report to your chief?"

"You may report as you please, Colonel Folger, but I propose to proceed with you, even though I am assured that we will both suffer terrible defeat."

Colonel Folger pondered for a while, and then made up his mind to use the prisoner as a guide to the forest. So shortly a strong party set forth with the masked outlaw in their midst. When they reached the hut the masked youth refused to go further, saying he could not know anything about the retreat of the outlaws, as he had been confined since he was born.

The detective then said as he was in duty bound to return to the outlaws, he would lead them. He went on in advance of the others, and soon he was seized from behind by the other masked rider and forced to mount the iron gray horse. He was then blindfolded and after a short ride was conducted to an elegant chamber

which Josephine Morand had formerly occupied, and his daughter, Pauline, confronted him.

The masked outlaw stated he had entered into a compact with her father whereby he, the outlaw, was to marry her. Pauline said she would accept him if she knew who he was. Therefore the masked youth entered a room and soon returned with Count Wilburt. The masked youth told the count to reveal to the detective and his daughter his real identity. Then the count told the listener that he had every reason to suspect the masked one was his unfortunate son.

Colonel Folger, his daughter, the prisoner and the soldiers remained at the hut waiting for the detective's return. He did come and reported that it would be impossible to find the retreat of the outlaws as they had all disappeared. It was also rumored that Henry Wilburt was in Spain with his bride. So the party returned to the castle.

One day the colonel and the detective were riding through the forest, attended by the little dog, when the dog darted aside among some bushes. The two riders followed and beheld a human being lying upon the sward, a steel mask on his head, and he was caressing the dog. The two men darted behind some trees and stood watching.

CHAPTER X.—Pauline and the Masked Youth.

After watching for a while the two watchers heard the tramping of horses near them, and two animals burst out on the green sward bearing two boyish-looking riders. The first figure on the green sward looked up on hearing the riders and exclaimed:

"Are you back so soon?"

Springing from the saddle the other replied, in joyous tones:

"Yes, we are back again, and we have accomplished the object of our visit as well."

Jacot then recognized the powerful steel gray horse on which the rider had been mounted, and he pressed his friend's arm as he whispered:

"The last comer is the real leader of the outlaws, as I know his horse. It would be madness to attack them now, as they are both giants in strength."

The other rider had also flung himself from the saddle, and the little dog sprang joyously to salute him, while the detective whispered:

"That is my daughter in boyish disguise."

The three persons thus brought together on the green sward were all soon seated and talking in the most friendly manner, the cunning Pauline leading in the conversation in very merry strains.

"What think you," she said, addressing the youth who first appeared to the watchers, "this young husband of mine will not trust me with the secret of the retreat yet, as I am to be blindfolded again to-night."

The leader of the outlaws chuckled aloud as he replied to the young woman:

"It is the rule of the band that no new recruit shall know our retreat until he has been a member for a month at least."

The young girl shook her head as she protested:

"But I am not a recruit. I am your lawful wife, and you should confide in me."

The detective and his soldier friend could hear every word thus uttered, and Jacot whispered to the other, saying:

"The brave girl is doing her utmost. If we can but track them to the retreat we can bring a force to overpower them all."

The three people on the green sward continued to chat merrily, Pauline protesting that she would run away from her outlaw husband if he had not more confidence in her, while he answered by saying:

"The rules must be observed. When the honeymoon is over I will trust you, and not before."

While they were thus conversing the two horses kept grazing around them, the leader of the outlaws raised his head every now and again, as if waiting for some expected signal. The signal came at last in the form of a cry of a startled bird, and the man sprang to his feet, saying:

"You will remain here with my wife, my friend, and I hope to be back within an hour."

The outlaw then sprang on his powerful horse and the animal darted away out of the grove at full speed.

"Do you believe that my husband mistrusts me, or is he really bound to keep the secret from me?" she asked the masked youth.

"I do not believe that Captain Mask would deceive you on the subject, as I have never known him to utter a falsehood, young lady."

"How long have you known Captain Mask?"

"For about a year, perhaps."

"Did you never see his face?"

"I never saw his face, I assure you. Now do not ask me any more questions concerning my friend, as I am also bound to secrecy."

"It is very strange that your voices should be so much alike, and your forms as well, but I can note a difference in your tones."

"How is that, young lady?"

"Your voice is far more gentle in its tones, and when you move about your limbs appear to be under more restraint. My husband moves and talks as if accustomed to a free life, while you——"

"You are right, young lady," interrupted the masked youth, "your husband has led a free life from his birth, while I have spent most of my time cooped up in a dreary apartment. Your husband has commanded a free band in this wild forest, while I have only heard the voices of a few human beings in my lifetime."

The detective and his soldier friend could hear every word thus uttered and the latter then remarked:

"That is certainly the prisoner of Vindy Castle, and it would not serve us much to capture him at present."

At that moment the little dog appeared to remember his old master, and he darted toward the spot where he was hiding, as if in quest of some game. Pauline said to herself:

"Bravo has been with father, and he must be on the alert now quite near us. He could not move through the woods with a force of soldiers without the outlaws being warned, and he must be alone now."

The clever girl noticed the last movement of the little dog, and she darted toward the trees after him as she cried aloud:

"Bravo, Bravo, where are you straying? The little wretch must have spied a rabbit."

The daring girl kept on after the dog until she reached the shelter of the trees, while the youth kept gazing up at the stars without suspecting any treachery on her part, as he muttered to himself:

"She is a sweet creature, and Captain Mask is very fortunate in winning her as a bride. It is true she asks a great many questions, but who can blame one in her position for being inquisitive?"

When Jacot saw his daughter approaching him after the little dog he motioned to the officer to retreat, and when the young girl drew near he made known his presence by a subdued signal etc he clasped her in his arms, saying in whispered tones:

"Be not alarmed, dear Pauline."

"Dear father, you risk too much. Have you ventured here alone after Bravo?"

"One brave friend is here alone with me."

"Then you will be in fearful danger if you are discovered. What do you propose to do?"

"Track you and your friends to the retreat, and then hasten here with the soldiers."

"It is too dangerous. Better to wait until I have gained their confidence, and then all will be well. The truth is that my husband and the person you see out there are both noble persons, and I would spare them, if it is possible."

"How do you propose to spare them? Even were I so disposed, Colonel Folger is here with me, and he has sworn the destruction of the outlaws of the forest."

Before the young girl could reply the masked youth sprang up from the green sward and ran toward the spot where they were standing, crying aloud:

"I will join in the chase with you, young lady, and the little dog will lead us."

Motioning her father to the shelter of some bushes the young girl sprang out to meet the youth, crying:

"Do not let us leave the spot or Captain Mask would be alarmed on his return. I will soon bring Bravo back here again."

As the young woman spoke she drew the masked youth back into the green sward, calling aloud for the little dog at the same time. They had scarcely gained the spot where they had been resting, when the outlaw leader rode into the clear space again as he cried out in angry tones:

"What is the meaning of this outcry here?"

"It was only my dog running after a rabbit, and I called on him to return."

"Then let me caution you not to call loud again, as strangers were seen in the forest to-night. That dog of yours will betray us yet, if I do not put him out of the way at once."

"You would not be so cruel as to injure the little animal, Captain Mask?" asked the other youth.

"If he does I will hate him," cried the young girl, in pouting tones.

Captain Mask drew a bandage from his pocket and proceeded to bind the young woman's eyes

in a careful manner as he laughingly replied: "It is not in your power to hate me. Mount the other horse, Joseph, and we will away to the retreat."

As the outlaw spoke he placed his wife up on the powerful gray horse and then sprang up behind her. The other horse was still grazing near them, and the second masked youth sprang on his back with the little dog in his arms as he cried:

"I will blindfold Bravo."

The two men then darted away through the wood on their swift steeds, while Colonel Folger turned to his companion, saying:

"Let us after them at all hazards."

"It will be folly to attempt the pursuit of them on their fleet steeds, and I would advise you to wait until I hear from my daughter again."

CHAPTER XI.—Pauline Discovers the Path.

The charming young wife kept chiding her husband in a playful manner as they rode on through the dense forest, although she felt depressed at the same time for more reasons than one. While Pauline had never seen the face of the strange being whom she had wedded, she had learned to like him very much, and she had also become attached to the wild life they were leading. The leader of the outlaws could be very gentle and kind when not dealing with his enemies, and he made much ado about his young wife, although he had not yet learned to trust her fully. The fact that her father and the gallant soldier were so close on their track troubled Pauline very much indeed.

"Would that father had returned to Paris, and given up this quest forever."

While the wayward being was thus perplexing her mind she could realize from the splashing of water beneath her that the horse was plunging through a stream. At that moment the bandage slipped from one of her eyes without it being perceived by her husband, and the young girl could note the route they were proceeding. She saw that they were dashing along through a shallow stream with high banks on each side, and that the trees around them formed an arbor over the water. After proceeding some distance, the horse sprang through an opening in the bank, and then dashed down into a glade. While the young creature was still making observations she found herself in a dark underground passage through which the horse walked carefully, and she knew that they were then entering the secret retreat of the outlaws. Pauline had been out several times at night with her husband and his friends, but that was the first time that she had an opportunity of noting the path leading to the retreat. On reaching the splendid apartment in which she had been first received, Captain Mask removed the bandage, saying:

"I will have to leave you for over an hour now, as I must see my friends on very important business, and I may have to sally forth again to-night."

"Why must you sally forth?" asked the perplexed girl.

"Because I have received information that

there are strangers in the forest to-night. Are you certain that your father has returned to Paris?"

"You know more of his movements than I do. He promised you to return, and he does not generally break his word."

"Your father has broken his word with me more than once, and for your sake I spared him. If he ventures in pursuit of me again he must die, as it is so decreed by the band."

Without saying another word the outlaw left the apartment, and Pauline shuddered a little as she said to herself:

"He suspects that I am in communication with my father, and that he is here in the forest again. What must I do to save them all?"

The young woman then pondered seriously for some moments ere she said to herself:

"Yes, I must risk it. Father will persist until he succeeds or meets with death, and that officer is as obstinate as he is. I must find some means of making a compromise."

The daring girl had been a very keen observer during her stay in the cave, and she had every reason to believe that there was more than one passage leading out into the forest from it. Believing that she had an hour to spare before the return of her husband, she stole forth by the main door leading into the apartment, and she soon reached the dark passage through which they had traversed that night. Pushing on fearlessly, with an excuse ready on her lips in case of need, Pauline kept on until she found herself in another large cavern which was used as a stable, and in which several horses were resting at the time. A lamp was burning in the stable, by the light of which the daring girl could count the steeds therein, and she muttered to herself:

"There cannot be many of the band abroad to-night, and I will dare to venture forth."

Selecting the horse which she had ridden that evening, Pauline led him forth in to the passage, sprang on his back as she turned his head toward the passage, and then urged him fearlessly forward, as she again said to herself:

"He will guide me through the secret path."

The spirited animal bounded forward, as if delighted to be out in the free air again, and the daring girl soon found herself in the deep glade leading up to the stream. Without pausing to reflect on the perilous adventure she was undertaking, she urged him on through the stream as she murmured to herself in merry tones:

"I told him that I would fly from him if he did not trust me, and that will be my excuse if I am pursued and captured again. Yet I have no thought of deserting my husband forever."

While pushing on through the stream and keeping on the lookout for another opening in the bank, Pauline heard the splashing of hoofs in the water behind her, and she gasped forth:

"Merciful goodness, I am pursued."

It was too dark to perceive who her pursuer was while dashing along through the stream, but the spirited steed under her soon bounded out on a path in the forest and then swept on at a splendid pace. Casting another glance back at her pursuer, Pauline recognized the gray steed and she said to herself:

"It is my husband who is in pursuit, and I will lead him as long a chase as I can."

The wayward girl then urged on the fleet steed under her without attempting to guide him, as she trusted that he would make for the road by the path through which he was best accustomed. On after her dashed the gray steed and his rider, and the adventurous girl soon realized that her pursuer was gaining on her at every stride. She did not give up the race, however, as she urged on the horse, quite fearless of the overhanging branches, as she said to herself:

"I will make a jest of my adventure, and laugh at him when he does capture me."

The pursuer did not utter a word or cry as he swept on after his bride, who soon reached the green sward where they had all reclined under the observation of the detective and the soldier. On perceiving that her race was nearly run, Pauline pulled up suddenly on the center of the sward and turned to the outlaw, as she merrily cried:

"I told you that I would fly from you if you did not confide in me."

Captain Mask did not utter a single word until he had grasped the bridle of the fugitive; and he then glared at his wife from under the mask, as he demanded in very hoarse tones:

"Why did you fly from me?"

"Did I not tell you that I would fly if you did not confide in me? And I always keep my word."

"How did you discover the path?"

The young woman tapped her horse on the neck as she replied:

"This was my guide. It was easy to find my way to the stables, and then he led me out."

"Do you really wish to go out into the world again, Pauline?"

"A woman always wishes the impossible. If you gave me permission to go abroad I would not go."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Quite certain. If you had not placed the bandage on my eyes to-night I would not have been tempted to ride forth."

"Are you certain that you did not ride forth in search of someone?"

"What a question. Who could I expect to meet save one of your band?"

"Your father, for instance. Are you not aware that he is spying around here again?"

"Is that possible? Ah, you are but trying to test me, you wicked rogue."

"I am not trying to test you. Your father is in this wood to-night with Colonel Folger. It is in your power to betray me, and you are at liberty to do so, as I set you free. Farewell forever! The horse will guide you out on the road, and then you can find your way to Vindy Castle."

The clever young woman was confused at last by this unexpected announcement, and her face became as red as scarlet as she stammered forth:

"You do not mean that."

"I do mean it, Pauline. I was a fool to claim you at all, but I was infatuated with you, and I hoped to make you happy as the bride of the outlaw. I now perceive that you are discontented at your fate, and the only recompense that I can offer you is your freedom. Your release may be my death, but I will take the risk. There is your path, and farewell forever."

The wayward young creature realized that her husband was in full earnest, and her heart softened to him on the instant, as she grasped his hand, crying:

"No, no! I will not leave you, my brave husband. How bitterly do I confess that I did wed you only to betray you, but now——"

"But you must carry out your purpose," cried another voice as Jacot and Colonel Folger sprang out from the trees with their swords and pistols ready for use. "Surrender, vile outlaw, or we will slay you on the instant!"

At the same moment over twenty soldiers sprang out on the green sward, and the outlaw and his bride were surrounded on all sides. A terrified scream broke from the young woman as she turned to her father, crying:

"Oh, spare him, spare him. Dear husband, I did not betray you."

Captain Mask glared around at his foes for an instant or two, as if meditating a dash through them on his powerful steed, but when he saw them closing on him with so many weapons aimed at his body, he held up his hands as he cried:

"Betrayed by a woman! I surrender to you, Colonel Folger!"

"Never surrender!" cried another hoarse voice, as the other masked youth dashed out on the glade followed by a dozen of the outlaws, who poured a volley into the soldiers on the instant. Seeing aid thus at hand, Captain Mask drew his sword and dashed at Colonel Folger, crying:

"I recall my words. The outlaw of Vindy will never surrender!"

One sweep of the powerful arm and the gallant officer was felled to the ground. Then on dashed the steed with his rider, cutting to the right and left, as he cried:

"Follow me if you have not betrayed me, Pauline."

The young girl did dash on after her outlaw husband, as she cried:

"Spare my father, and I will cling to you forever."

CHAPTER XII.—The Steel Masks Stand Together.

When Colonel Folger declared that he would start out alone in search of the outlaw's retreat, Jacot as a brave man was compelled to follow him. The detective was very much annoyed by the words and actions of his wayward daughter, and he saw that the young girl had become infatuated with the wild life she was then leading. He also perceived with pain that she was becoming attached to the outlaw, and that she was very partial to the person who resembled him so much. "How then can I expect her to lead us to the outlaw's retreat?" Jacot asked himself. "It is very evident to me that she will prefer to shield her new friends instead of betraying them."

The two men proceeded together for some distance, when they encountered a strong party of soldiers under the command of Count Wilburt. The count had received some private communications relative to the movements of the outlaws that evening, and not finding either Colonel Folger or Jacot at the castle he sallied out with a

force in order to intercept the Free Riders if possible. After consulting together, Count Wilburt, Colonel Folger, and Jacot agreed to divide the force and make a search in the paths near the green opening. It was agreed that Count Wilburt should take the larger force and proceed along one path, while the detective and Colonel Folger would prowl around the grove with twenty men, in the hope of intercepting some of the outlaws returning to the retreat. Signals were also arranged, so that the two parties should come together in case of need. Colonel Folger and his men were thus enabled to pounce out on the leader of the outlaws when he was consulting with his wife in the center of the green sward. It soon became evident to the smaller band of soldiers that the outlaws were trained veterans, as they rushed to the rescue of their leader in splendid order, and almost every shot fired by them told on their foes.

Captain Mask soon cut his way through his foes, having stretched Colonel Folger and two others wounded on the ground. His friends closed with their surviving foes almost at the same moment and sent them flying in disorder with little or no loss to themselves. During the excitement of the attack, Colonel Folger forgot to send forth the signal, but as he lay wounded on the ground with his men flying before him, he remembered that aid was nigh, and he sent forth the cry agreed upon.

Captain Mask soon placed himself at the head of his own band, all of whom were on foot save himself and his wife, and when he had dispersed the soldiers he led them away through a path in the forest. Jacot had received a blow of a sword that laid him senseless for the time being, and when he recovered he saw that all the combatants had disappeared except those who had been badly wounded or slain. Captain Mask and his followers had scarcely entered the path when they were suddenly assailed by Count Wilburt and his party, who had heard the shots and the signals, and who were hastening to the aid of their friends. The soldiers formed a compact body in the pathway, and they rushed to the assault in the most perfect order, forcing the outlaws back toward the open sward again. Colonel Folger and Jacot had then rallied some of the fugitives, and they rushed to attack the outlaws in the rear. Being thus assailed in front and rear, and being outnumbered as three to one, the outlaws were compelled to give way in turn.

Captain Mask soon saw that it was impossible for him to escape on horseback, and he sprang from the steed, crying to his men:

"Scatter to the right and left."

The outlaw leader then turned for a moment to his bride, saying:

"If you are faithful follow me."

The young girl was in the act of springing from the horse, when a bullet struck her on the shoulder and she fell on the path, crying:

"I am faithful unto death. I swear that I did not betray you."

Captain Mask only waited to discharge his weapon at the foes who were closing on him, when he stooped suddenly down and raised the

wounded girl in his arms, darting into the trees with her as he cried:

"Then we will live or die together."

The other masked youth stood by his friend right through, and when the latter retreated into the wood with his bride he kept close behind him as if to shield him in the retreat. As the soldiers were very close on the outlaws when the latter scattered, they pressed close after them through the dense trees, yelling the while as if in pursuit of so many wolfs.

Colonel Folger was not able to join in the pursuit, but Count Wilburt and Jacot, with five or six soldiers, pressed close on after the two masked youths, the former yelling aloud:

"Take them alive, if possible."

Being impeded by his wounded bride, Captain Mask was not able to fly with his usual speed, and his pursuers pressed on close behind them, while his faithful friend in the steel mask would turn every now and then to strike at one of the soldiers with a heavy club which he had used in the fray. Captain Mask still pressed on in the hope of evading the pursuit with his wounded bride, when a chance shot struck him in the back, and he fell against a tree, crying:

"It is all over now, but we will fight to the death!"

Placing the wounded girl behind the tree, the two masked youths stood back to back on the other side of it, Captain Mask crying to his foes:

"Come on and see how we can fight and die."

Jacot was the first in the pursuit at the moment, and he turned to the soldiers, crying:

"For mercy sake do not fire or you will shoot my daughter."

"Close in on them and take them alive," yelled Count Wilburt, who was close behind.

The count then sent forth a hunting cry that brought several others of the soldiers to their aid. Then fully a dozen men rushed on the two mysterious youths, who kept up the struggle like wild boars at bay, cutting and striking at their foes with all the fury of hunted beasts. Jacot and Count Wilburt fought to disarm and overpower the strange being while the latter cried:

"Surrender, fools, and we will show you mercy."

"There is my answer," cried Captain Mask, as he struck the count on the sword arm and sent him reeling back on the ground. Being enraged by the desperate resistance offered them and by the fall of the count, the veteran soldiers set on with greater fury, and Captain Mask was soon knocked to the earth by the furious blows aimed at him with the muskets in the hands of the soldiers. The other masked youth beheld the fall of his brother, but it only served to enrage him the more, as he sprang to and fro with his huge club, dealing fearful blows on his foes at every turn. While the former prisoner of the castle was thus engaged in the unequal struggle, his masked friend recovered his senses and addressed him in pleading tones, crying:

"All is over with me, dear Henry. Fly, and save yourself, I implore you. I am dying now,

and you cannot save me. I command you to fly."

Being thus appealed to, the person addressed as Henry dashed through his foes, knocking them to the right and to the left with his club, and bounded into the dense bushes, crying:

"No more prison chambers for me. I will live and die a free man in the forest."

Several of the soldiers dashed after the fugitive, while Jacot hastened to seek his daughter, as he cried aloud:

"Pauline, dear Pauline, where are you? It is your father who calls on you."

There was no response to the appeal, and the miserable man could not find any trace of his daughter. When the wounded girl had been placed behind the tree she was in a fainting condition, as well as a little delirious from her wound and the excitement, and she remained perfectly still for some moments. Her father's voice and the sounds of the fierce strife around her soon revived her, however, and she listened until she heard the voice of her dying husband calling on his masked friend to fly for his life.

"If my husband dies I will die in the woods also, as it was I who betrayed him, though I did not mean to do it."

In truth, the young girl was half frantic through her intense excitement, and she could not comprehend what she was doing at the moment. All the soldiers and Jacot had darted away in quest of the two fugitives, leaving the count alone with the dying masked man on the scene of the last struggle. The soldiers who had been wounded in the last scene of strife were crawling out toward the greensward, where Colonel Folger and some of their comrades were still lying. The masked leader did not utter a word after his friend had fled, but he lay with his face to the ground as if sleeping the sleep of death.

The count arose from the ground and approached the fallen man, saying:

"Are you still alive, miserable youth?"

The fallen youth did not answer his question, and the count exclaimed aloud:

"He is dead."

"Who is dead?" demanded a croaking voice as an old woman emerged from the bushes.

"The masked leader of the outlaws, Margot. Will you now explain the mystery?"

"Oh, do not say that he is dead. Mercy, mercy, he has ceased to live, the brave, noble, kind-hearted youth. It is a pity, indeed!"

"Who is he, Margot? Do not try to trifle with me now, or I will put you to death."

"He is your son, Count Wilburt."

"Impossible, woman. Then who is the other?"

"The other is your son, also."

"Are you mad, Margot?"

"I am not mad, Count Wilburt. I now inform you for the first time that your wife gave birth to two children on that dreadful night."

"It is impossible! If such was the case, how was the secret kept from me?"

"It was kept from you, Count Wilburt, and with my aid. On the birth of the first boy, and when you fled from him in dismay, I alone re-

mained with your wife. The other child was born soon after, and then the unfortunate lady died of fright. Before she died, however, she begged of me to conceal the last born, and I consented, fearing to shock you too much by revealing the truth."

"And were they both deformed?"

"They resembled each other as closely as possible, and even their mother could not tell them apart," replied old Margot, in sad tones. "The one you see now lying there before you was the babe I placed in charge of my sister, who was the wife of a charcoal burner in the forest. The other was the poor youth who was so long a prisoner in your castle."

"This is almost incredulous!" gasped the count, with a deep sigh.

"It is the solemn truth," replied old Margot, in the most earnest tones. "The youth lying there before you was brought up in the dense forest, where he was never seen except by my sister and her husband. I supplied them with funds for the support of the child, and I paid a visit to them every now and again."

"How did this unfortunate being become a leader of the outlaws?"

"On the death of my sister and her husband I attended the funeral, and I had a long consultation with the lad, who was then sixteen years of age. He had already become acquainted with some of the lawless deserters and other outlaws infesting the forest, and he was regarded by them as a superior being on account of his steel mask, as well as his extraordinary strength and agility."

"Then I can readily understand how he became the leader of the outlaws."

"He became the leader of the outlaws," replied the old woman, "not because he was depraved in heart, but because he could not go abroad in the world to seek his fortune, and he was compelled to make the forest his home forever."

"Why could he not appeal to me?"

"Appeal to you! Then you would have had him seized and placed in a living tomb to share the fate of his unfortunate brother. Over a year ago I informed him of his true history, and I told him that he had a brother pining in solitary captivity."

"Why did you thus betray me, Margot?"

"Because I pitied the poor youth whom I had watched over in his prison since childhood, and who was longing to breathe the free air of the forest. I will not betray certain secrets, but I can tell you that the youth now lying there dead soon managed to communicate with his brother, and he often visited him in secret at night at the castle."

"I am only surprised that the other did not fly from the castle ere now," said the count.

"He would have deserted his prison ere now, sir count, and I would have fled with him, were it not that he desired to baffle certain plots concocted by you and your daughter."

"Then it was the prisoner in the deserted wing who baffled me in my late proposed marriage?"

"It was, sir count, with the aid of his brave

CURRENT NEWS

DREAM PROVED TRUE

Its resting place revealed in a dream of a brother, an eight-year-old lad, the body of Roy Tew, drowned in the Arkansas River near Led-
 ville, was discovered by Abner Tew.

While picking up driftwood along the river bank, Roy fell into the stream when the bank collapsed. His father, Tom Tew, came near losing his life in an attempt to save his son. Neighbors searched for several hours for the body of Roy, and it was finally given up as lost.

The next morning his younger brother, Abner, told his parents as soon as he awoke that he had had a dream in which he saw where Roy's body was concealed. The parents paid little attention to the boy, but he insisted so strongly that he was allowed to go and make a search. He walked straight to a log which extended from the river bank and pointed to an object which proved to be the dead boy in the sand, exactly as Abner had described from his dream.

A BULL FIGHT

Two blooded and pedigreed bulls, one St. Mawes II., a Jersey, and the other an equally aristocratic Guernsey, fought a battle royal on the ranch of George Williams, near Tillimook, Ore., a few nights ago which resulted in the death of St. Mawes II. from wounds inflicted by the Guernsey.

The Jersey, it appeared, had been the aggressor. The two animals were quartered separately in a large barn. In the night St. Mawes II. broke out of his quarters and into those of the Guernsey. There was challenge in his voice and his defiance was taken up quickly. Attracted by the clanging of heavy horns striking heavier bodies and the angry following of the animals, the people on the ranch rushed forth in time to see St. Mawes II. hurled to the ground, his body pinned in a dozen places where the horns of the Guernsey had struck him. He soon died of his wounds. The Guernsey's injuries were not serious.

MURDER CONFESSION WRITTEN ON WALL

Charles Guthrie, a tile setter, of 83 Truxton street, Brooklyn, N. Y., found this message written on the wall of a building which is being constructed at 1011 East Nineteenth street, Brooklyn:

"I must write my confession before I kill myself. I want that whoever reads this should notify the police, because by this time I am dead. I killed Marie Lenor of Manchester, Vt., on June 15, 1920. I cannot live any longer because wherever I go I am hunted. So, kind reader, have pity on me, I am the man, not James Droucher, who killed her. Notify the police so that he may go free. I, Edward Manning of Brooklyn, killed her with a gun that will be found at the tollgate at the road leading to Rutland."

Above the message was a diagram, showing where the gun was hidden. Guthrie notified the

police of the Parkville station, who communicated with the authorities at Manchester. The police there said that they had no record of such a murder, but would investigate.

OLD PIGSTY FOUNDATION OF LIBRARY

A reading room and library that can exist in complete independence and probable ignorance that any such person as Andrew Carnegie ever lived is sufficiently unique to command attention. One such not only exists but flourishes in a pigsty in Hartshay, a Derbyshire, England, hamlet, and its beginning possesses many interesting features.

Up to about thirty years ago the men, the sober-minded ones, had no other meeting place in Hartshay after the day's work was done than the bridge over the Cromford and Derby Canal. There they smoked, read the evening paper aloud and talked over current events. This was not a bad rallying place when the weather was warm and fair, but in the winter it was not quite as pleasant. Then, when it rained or was very cold, they walked down the towpath and held their meetings under the bridge.

In the autumn of 1892 one of the members of the little assembly came into undisputed possession of a pigsty, the former occupants of which had been converted into pork. The new owner furnished it with a few boxes for seats and invited his mates to make it their winter headquarters. They jumped at the chance, and thenceforth met nightly in the pigsty.

It was the rudest hovel, barely six feet square, and without windows, so candles were necessary day and night. To enter it was necessary to crawl through the low door on hands and knees. Nevertheless, the former habitues of the canal bridge promptly constituted themselves a society, and drew up rules for the government of Lower Hartshay Reading Room.

Soon a rough table was added; a daily and a weekly newspaper were subscribed for, and in addition to the few books that the members owned, a number were contributed by outsiders. Five nights in the week reading, smoking, games and social intercourse were in order; but Wednesday and Friday evenings were devoted to reading aloud by the best scholar, and the first two books thus read were Carlyle's "French Revolution" and Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

When there were twenty or more members they decided to take the adjoining pigsty. A full size door was put in; a skylight placed in the roof; rough wooden benches added; also a battered and smoking stove; the walls were white-washed and book shelves put up. All the work was done by the members.

Thanks to good financial management, the shelves are now laden with books; otherwise the pigsty library has not been further improved. Nor is there need of finer surroundings; the men are the thing.

CHARLIE CHAPMAN'S COURAGE

—OR—

THE BOY WHO TOOK CARE OF HIS MOTHER

By WILLIAM WADE

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER VII (Continued)

Yet no one could truthfully say that the judge had not earned every penny of it. He never took up a case at law which was not on the side of justice, and yet many a case which he handled did not pay him a copper penny.

He was a model lawyer, and Charlie knew that the old fellow was the best friend he had, outside of his mother.

"Hello, Charlie," said the judge, cheerily. "I was just talking about you. Friend Meeks told me how you brought him into taking back an old plow. That was good business ability, and if you keep this up you will win that wager, Charlie."

Young Chapman shook his head with a very serious expression on his face.

"Judge Cromley, I have a good many difficulties to face, and now I have a worse one than ever before. I wish you would help me."

"Of course, lad," cried the judge. "You know I would do anything. Is it that you are pressed for a little cash—if so, speak up?"

Charlie smiled as he responded:

"Yes, sir. I am pressed for cash. But I intend to make it a hot press for the men who are pressing me."

"What do you mean? Some sort of sharp trading being worked upon you?"

Charlie nodded, and then told of the earlier interview which he had kept to himself, and of the one that day. He told of the tenant being hidden as a witness.

The judge thumped a big, fat, yellow lawbook down upon the desk in excitement.

"My boy, that is fine! You have acted remarkably well. I congratulate you. We can manage it easily, and land them where they won't need any cash for their board and keep for many a long month."

"Then that is a bad offense, is it, judge?" asked Charlie, eagerly. "Is this enough to indict them?"

"You bet it is," responded the judge, even forgetting the usual dignity which he made keep company with a silk hat and a long coat. "That politician took money for an illegal use, and you did not give him enough to make you liable, for you are acting as a police official. You meet them at the hotel, and go inside. I will be there, with a marshal, and will have a warrant sworn out before you get through your talk."

Charlie went to the hotel, and there he met the three men, who regarded him with sour looks.

They had not forgotten the dust which he had sent them with his compliments.

"Let's get right down to business matters," said Benton, grimly. "Have you the money?"

The assemblyman spoke up in a warning way, as he pointed to a number of the villagers who regarded the strangers with curiosity.

"See here, Henderson Benton, don't spoil everything by coarse work now. We don't want to change money outside the hotel here. You don't know who sees it."

"That's right," agreed Jake Woods. "Let's step inside—there ought to be some room we can go to."

"There is," said Charlie, as he tied Black Nell to the hitching rail outside the "Fernbank Palace Hotel" as the hostelry was labeled. "Follow me, gentlemen."

The three men went in after him.

Charlie entered the hallway of the hotel, and then turned to a little room which contained one big table, on which were a few sheets of letter paper and some cheap envelopes.

This made it the "correspondence room."

"Now, I'd like to know just what I am to get for the rest of my money," said Charlie Chapman.

The politician spoke promptly.

He was the kind of man always ready with a promise of any sort.

"I will fix it with the court officials so that you can't be prosecuted on this note which my clients hold against your late father's estate."

"Well, how will I be assured that I can be protected—will you put this in writing?" asked Charlie. "You know, I must be certain before I put up four hundred and ninety dollars."

The three men exchanged startled glances, and then shook their heads.

"No sirree bob!" cried Benton. "Nothing like that. If you don't want to take his word for it—a well-known member of the State Legislature, as he is—then you will have to lose his wire pulling."

Charlie shot a keen glance at the dark-skinned man.

"Say, you are mighty keen about this—considering that it will cause a loss of five hundred dollars on what you claim that note calls for. How about it?"

Benton stammered.

"Well," continued Charlie. "I will agree to pay it if your man here will sign a receipt for the money as my personal representative in the matter."

The three muttered between themselves.

Charlie was willing. He was only playing for time.

Then Benton nodded, and the politician, Marble, turned toward Charlie.

"All right, I will sign a receipt. Here goes: Received of C. Chapman five hundred dollars for legal services, as representative of his father's estate. William Marble."

The man wrote it on a piece of the hotel paper, using the scratchy old pen, and handed it to Charlie with a smile. He did not relinquish hold of the paper, however.

(To be continued.)

THE NEWS IN SHORT ARTICLES.

IOWANS RAID \$52 QUART BOOTLEGGERS

Indignant because of an effort to hold them up for \$52 a quart, and using shot guns to rout an Omaha booze runner from his car, several thirsty Atlantic men seized his entire stock, sixteen quarts.

The Omaha man halted his motor car in the outskirts of the city and advertised his wares by secret code. Prospective purchasers soon arrived but they found his price of \$52 was a quart, and returned to town to hold a consultation on ways and means.

Marshalling reinforcements they again left with two guns for the place where lay the oasis. Hiding in the weeds, they fired into the air and the stranger, evidently believing revenue officers reinforced by United States sharpshooters were on his scent, abandoned car and liquor stock and fled. Then the thirsty divided the liquor and left.

HAWAIIAN NATIVES BECOMING EXTINCT

Hawaii's native race will be extinct in seventy-five years if the ratio of births and deaths set by the official figures for the fiscal years 1919-20 is maintained. This is indicated by the report of Dr. F. E. Trotter, president of the Territorial Board of Health, which shows that during the year the deaths of pure blooded Hawaiians totalled 1,009, while there were 676 births.

There are approximately 25,000 pure blooded Hawaiians living on the Hawaiian Islands, according to estimates. Reports for past years show decreases in their numbers.

In marked contrast with the evidence that the Hawaiians are members of a "dying race" are the vital statistics dealing with those who represent mixtures of Hawaiian with Caucasian and Asiatic blood.

Of the Caucasian-Hawaiians 249 died during the last fiscal year, while there were 699 births in that section of the Territory's population. The Asiatic-Hawaiian strain—principally Chinese-Hawaiian—recorded 163 deaths and 491 births.

The natural increase in the Japanese population of the Territory during the year was 3,366. During the year there were 4,963 births and 1,597 deaths among the Japanese.

THE TOAD HAS HIS USES

Formerly the toad was held to be a venomous reptile, but in our own day its habits have been more carefully observed and its great value to the gardener has been established. Inasmuch as the toad destroys many species of harmful insects we should cultivate its friendship.

Now every tidy housewife detests the cockroach, the mouse and other vermin. Two or three domestic toads, it is said, will keep any premises clear of these. The toad is possessed of a timid and retiring disposition, loving dark corners and shady places, but under kind treatment becomes quite tame.

Many instances might be cited of pet toads remaining several years in a family and doing most valuable services, with no other compensation

than that of immunity from persecution. All that is necessary to secure the cooperation of the toad, indoors or out, is to provide it with cool and safe retreats by day and convenient access to water. It will then go forth to the performance of its nocturnal duty "without money and without price."

In Europe toads are carried to the cities to market and are purchased by the horticulturists, who by their aid are enabled to keep in check the multiplication of the insects that prey upon their fruits, flowers, &c.

There was a wise old toad that lived for more than thirty-six years in a hole beneath the door-step of a French farmhouse. How old it was when first noticed no one could say, but it had probably lived for a long time before familiarity with the sight of man emboldened it to rest tranquilly on the door-step over which persons were constantly passing.

The step became the batrachian's hunting ground, where, with little trouble, it might capture the ants which persisted in crossing and recrossing it. The toad, hunting for its supper, came to be regarded as one of the sights of the neighborhood, and certainly the skilful manner in which it used its wonderfully formed tongue entitled it to be ranked as an expert among hunters.

For one thing, it showed wonderful skill in judging distance; the tongue was never darted out until the insect came within a certain range. The accuracy of the creature's aim was another matter for surprise. The insects were generally in motion when the tongue was darted against them, but the arrow never failed to hit its mark.

The rapidity with which the tongue was shot forth excited much wonder. The operation is a complex one. The tongue is doubled or rolled up when in the mouth; therefore, a twofold action is required, an uncoiling of the weapon, and then the darting of it forth.

The withdrawing of the tongue, with the captured insect on the top, was not less remarkable. Notwithstanding the rapid motion, the fineness of the tongue tip and the struggles of the prey the victim was never dropped.

The toad was so tame that it might rightly be called domesticated. It would remain quietly in one hand and take its food from the other, provided a leaf was placed on the hand which held it. Without this precaution the warmth of the human hand was evidently annoying and uncomfortable to the chilly little fellow.

Few things seemed to please it more than to be placed on a table in the evening when the lamp was lighted. It would look around with the greatest confidence in its gleaming eye and when insects were placed on the table it snapped them up with even greater rapidity than in its day huntings.

In this way the toad lived for thirty-six years, the pet of the neighborhood. It might have lived many years more had not a tame but spiteful raven pecked out one of its eyes.

MY ADVENTURE WITH PIRATES

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

What induced me to go to sea I can but dimly remember. It is so many years ago and my first voyage was also my last.

Probably it was a somewhat lively imagination fostered by a course of reading, beginning with Robinson Crusoe and winding up rather abruptly with Captain Kidd, which latter volume my highly indignant father snatched from my hand just as I had reached a most thrilling episode, and cremated before my very eyes. However, the mischief was done, and sundry dead cats found hanging suspended from the rafters in the garret by ropes around their necks testified to the blood-thirsty thoughts that ran riot in my brain.

I was dispatched to college, but after a year's stay there was ignominiously expelled for inciting sedition and rebellion among my fellow-students and setting up a rival government of which I was the chief, and, as the first executive act of my short reign, condemning my worthy professor of Greek to death at the block.

I being thus sent home in disgrace, my father began to despair of ever making of me, his only child, an honorable member of society and successor in the tape and measurement business, in which he had accumulated a fortune.

As a last desperate resort our family physician, who, by the way, was a homeopathist, advised him to send me to sea and in search of pirates—on the well-known principle of curing like by like, and I may as well here remark that the remedy was a most effectual one. However, I was at that time in blissful ignorance of the reason of the wise physician's counsel and my delight can be imagined when one morning my father informed me that he had secured for me the appointment of midshipman in the schooner *Nancy Bell*, which was to set sail the next day for the South Sea Islands on a general trading cruise, capturing whatever pirates they conveniently came across on the voyage.

Obtaining from my father a sum which I deemed sufficient for my purpose, I, not without some difficulty, purchased an out-rig, including revolver, cutlasses, short swords, etc.; and thus fully equipped in a manner to strike terror, not only to the soul of the most valiant pirate of the sea, but of everybody else, who must have looked upon me as some escaped lunatic, I proudly strode the deck of the vessel that was to be the scene of my glorious exploits.

But why linger over the fond, tearful parting from my parents; the unalloyed bliss of the first day's voyage out; the utter misery of the succeeding two weeks, when I lay in my hammock, groaning and writhing in all the agonies of seasickness; the surprise that awaited me to find, on my recovery, all my gay garments, my pistols, weapons, powder and ammunition gone, and in their stead a pair of coarse white trousers, a blue navy shirt, a frieze jacket, leather belt and tarpaulin, and a pair of cowhide boots, in all of which I was obliged to array myself; the disgust

that overspread my countenance when informed by the captain, into whose presence I was summoned, that we were not going in search of pirates, and, in fact, would keep out of their way as much as possible; that my duty would chiefly consist in scrubbing the decks, wait on him personally and assist the sailors generally to the best of my ability, and that the slightest show of disobedience and insubordination on my part would be met by summary and condign punishment.

Weeks rolled by. We reached our destination, completed our traffic and with a valuable cargo of gold, spice and ebony wood on board set sail for home. One night I was roused from my sleep in the hammock by the cry of: "Pirates, pirates!"

"At last!" cried I, hastily scrambling into my clothes and rushing on deck. My ardent hopes were doomed to disappointment. When I reached the deck I found the pirate vessel lashed tightly to ours, while my captain was standing on board the strange craft, holding an apparently friendly conversation with a gigantic looking, swarthy-faced, heavily bearded chap, whom I at once put down to be the pirate chief himself.

The consultation was over in a few minutes and then the captain returned with the startling information that the pirate had agreed to accept one-fourth of our cargo as a condition of letting us continue our voyage. This was more than blood and flesh could stand! What! compromise with a rascally cut-throat before a shot had been fired or a blow struck? Shades of Paul Jones and all other maritime heroes forbid! If my captain was so recreant to all sense of duty and glory, I would show that the spirit of American bravery was not extinct in my bosom at least.

I leaped on the pirate's deck, and snatching a cutlass from the hands of a brawny negro, I flashed it before the chieftain's eyes and cried: "Come on, you shag-eared villain, you! I'm Young America, I am, and I'll——"

Before I could finish the sentence I felt myself raised in the air by the muscular negro and unceremoniously pitched into the sea. Down, down I went as in a bottomless abyss. I opened my mouth to scream for help, but only swallowed enough water to suffocate me. Finally consciousness left me. When I awoke I found myself lying on a couch of soft furs spread on the sandy ground of a little cave. A slight sound caused me to turn my head. I noticed what I took at first to be an angel standing beside my couch. A moment's thought convinced me, however, that she was a being of flesh and blood; in fact, a rare and radiant maiden, clad in an oriental costume as gorgeous and magnificent as she was beautiful. I now also observed a matronly looking woman, evidently my bewitching companion's attendant, standing at some distance.

"Senor is awake, Gracias Dios!" murmured the fair unknown in pure Spanish.

"Will senorita please tell me where I am and how I came here?" asked I faintly.

"Senor must not excite himself by talking," said the old lady, replying to my question, much to my chagrin. "The Princess Inez and myself were walking on the beach here two days ago and found your body lying on the shore, where it had

been cast by the waves. We brought you to the cave and restored you to life. That is all."

With these words she somewhat hastily departed with her maid.

The day passed quickly enough, but when the morrow came, contrary to my expectations, it brought no Brigitta, with a second instalment of food and wine and news from her whom I already denominated my heart's queen. On the following morning I was again left alone. I could edure the hunger and suspense no longer. Unarmed as I was, I left the cave and set out for a number of cottages which I beheld some distance inland. I was still rather weak and pale, but I resolutely pushed forward until I reached what I found to be a veritable pirates' village. A building more ambitious looking than the rest attracted my attention. I advanced to the vine-covered porch and boldly rapped at the closed window. Suddenly the wooden shutter was opened and a fairy-like hand, which I instantly recognized as belonging to my princess, was extended to me. I grasped the dainty fingers and gallantly raised them to my lips.

"Flee, senor," I heard Inez whisper. "My father has locked me and Brigitta in the house here. He suspects your presence on the island. Do not linger, but flee for your life!"

"Never, Inez!" cried I impulsively. "I will not leave you immured here like a felon in a cell. Besides, I cannot get off of this infernal island. I shall stay here and die with you and for you!"

"Oh, senor," begged she. "You do not know my father and Sancho. They have gone to search for you along the seashore. You must not return to the cave. Go hide in the woods, and Heaven protect you!"

Again she put out her hand and touched my brow as if to push me away, and at that moment with terrible cries came rushing toward me, saber in hand, the very pirate chief and negro whom I had already once before encountered.

"Diablos!" cried the chief. "So you are the dog whom my daughter cared for in the cave! The brat who dared to defy me to my own face! Ha, ha! Sancho," added he, turning with a grim laugh to the negro, "this youngster is the same chap whom you threw overboard. He wasn't born to be drowned—ha, ha!"

"Yah, yah!" grinned the black fiend. "We hang him, yah, yah!"

Resistance on my part was useless, and, seized by the brawny arms of the negro, I was raised bodily from the ground, and, with Inez's terrible shriek ringing in my ears, carried into the next hut. My prison—for such it proved to be—was entirely destitute of furniture, and being bound hand and foot with a couple of ropes lying near by, I was thrown on the floor and thus addressed by the chief:

"I'd like to cut your throat, you young whelp, but I'll not deprive my people of the pleasure of witnessing your death torments. They're out in their boats now, but they'll be in by sunset, and then we'll roast you alive. We'll do that, Sancho, won't we?"

"Yah, yah," replied the ebony-hued fiend, "we'll do that. It will be glorious fun!"

With that I was left alone, and it may be im-

agined that my thoughts were not of a very pleasant order. As I had become disgusted with the first phase of my maritime adventures, so now I was heartily sick of these latter developments. I wished myself back again in New York, and would gladly have resigned the rainbow-tinted air-castle I had reared since I had seen and known Inez, and taken up any position behind my father's counter. However, wishing did not help matters any, and as soon as daylight waned Sancho came to fetch me to my funeral pyre.

I had sufficiently schooled my features not to betray the agitation I felt, and determined to meet death as became an American.

The bands were removed from my feet but not from my hands, and I was marched out into an open space where there were about two score men and women. I was received with shouts and execrations by the assembled throng and at once led to a pile of wood and brushes which had been erected in the center of the plain.

There was no time left me for prayers or pleadings, if I felt inclined to indulge in any, which I did not; and having been tied to the stake, Sancho took up a flaming torch and was about to apply it to the combustible material by which I was surrounded when the throng was parted and Inez, wild and breathless, came rushing up to me, and throwing her arms around my neck, exclaimed:

"Now, Sancho, light the pine. We will perish together!"

The astonishment into which the pirates were thrown by this incident had not yet been dispelled before another and most unexpected intervention occurred.

"On them. Give them 'Hail Columbia!'"

The command rang out clear and distinct from the surrounding bushes, and the next instant, with many a shout and hurrah, there dashed toward us no others but a detachment of the crew of the *Nancy Bell*, led by my own captain.

The pirates were taken at a decided disadvantage, and before many minutes had elapsed the struggle was over, the villains either dead or wounded, and I and Inez rescued from an imminent and horrible death.

Among the killed were Sancho, the negro, and the pirate chief, the latter confessing before his death that Inez was not his daughter, but an American girl whom he had taken from a captured vessel when she was a child.

When Inez, Brigitta and myself, together with a good part of the pirate's treasure were safely on board the *Nancy Bell* the captain told me that his compromise with the pirate had been but a ruse to disarm the latter's suspicions, and that he had followed him to the island to be able to get the pirates at a disadvantage, in which, as we have seen, he was successful.

It is needless to add that my opinion of the captain underwent a radical change, and ever afterward I was never weary of lauding his bravery and sagacity.

However, I was glad enough to reach home once more, and was entirely cured of my roving disposition. When I arrived at my majority I became a partner in my father's business and the happy husband of Princess Inez.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 20, 1920.

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ITEMS OF INTEREST

TOWN IN DARKNESS FOR MOVIE

Because of a small auxiliary power plan which supplies Lovelock, Nev., with light since the big Nevada Valley's power plant was closed is not sufficiently large to operate lights while the motion picture theatre is using "juice," this place is without lights every night the "movie" is running. Candles and lanterns substitute for the electric illumination.

A WISE DOG

This is a question that has often been asked and written about, and people are not satisfied to answer either way. At Jackson, Miss., a boy named Harmon owned a dog, and because the canine didn't come at his call he was well licked and at once disappeared. In two hours he returned with another dog, and the strange dog at once bit the boy in the leg to punish him. If the boy's dog didn't think and reason, how did he bring such a thing about? He felt that the boy ought to be bitten, but didn't want to do it himself. A good smart dog catches on to things much quicker than a dull boy.

HORSE ROBS BOY

Do not flirt money in the face of a horse, as it is not safe. A twelve-year-old boy was walking along one of the business streets of Bellafonte, Pa., one afternoon with two \$1 bills. A horse was tied at the curb. The boy brushed the bills across the animal's nose. The horse got a whiff of the bills. Then the boy made another pass at the horse with the bills, and the animal opened its mouth and the bills disappeared. The boy was so astounded he hardly realized what had happened for a minute, but when he did he cried: "Whoa," "back up" and all the horse talk he knew, but the horse calmly chewed the bills and swallowed them.

TO TRAP BEAVER FOR THE FUR

Efforts to have the Legislature permit the trapping of beaver for their furs in the Adirondack region are to be made in force this winter by the Guides' Associations, land owners of private preserves and other organizations. It is claimed that

there are enough beaver in the woods country to permit a slaughter of 5,000 for their furs annually without diminishing the supply.

It is proposed to have permits granted to trappers which will authorize the capture of not to exceed three or four members of each beaver family in a dam or on a stream. Where there are several families, as in large overflows and lakes, the number of beaver captured may be restricted to so many per beaver house. In this way, it is claimed, the supply will be kept up without extermination in any locality. Also the number to be taken by any trapper would be restricted to ten or twelve, as in Western states.

It is figured that 5,000 beaver would add from \$50,000 to \$75,000 to the trappers' incomes in the Adirondacks, and sportsmen would be enabled to trap their own overcoat linings. And a good many private preserve owners have caught the forty or fifty mink or muskrat needed to create such a garment, and added a pekan or otter or two for trimming, and caught foxes or marten for the muffs and capes of the missus.

The Adirondack region was badly overtrapped the past two years, and practically all the animals, except beaver, are greatly reduced in numbers.

LAUGHS

"Here, waiter, there's a fly in my soup."
"Serves the brute right. He's been buzzin' round here all the mornin'."

General (noticing face powder on soldier's arm)—What does this mean, sir? Soldier—Effects of a pressing engagement, sir!

"What are you crying about, my little man?"
"All my brothers have got a month's holiday and I ain't got none." "Why, that's too bad. How is that?" "Boo-hoo! I don't go to school yet."

"I think I had better get a job before we marry." "Don't be so unromantic, Freddy. I won't need any clothes for a long, long time." "But you may want to eat almost immediately, my dear."

"Come, Willie," said his mother, "don't be so selfish. Let your little brother play with your marbles a while." "But," protested Willie, "he means to keep them always." "Oh, I guess not." "I guess yes! 'Cause he's swallowed two o' them already."

A cowardly fellow, having kicked a newsboy for pestering him to buy an evening newspaper, the lad waited till another boy accosted the "gentleman," and then shouted in the hearing of the bystanders: "It's no use to try him, Jimmie, he can't read."

An Irishman at a fair was poked in the eye with a stick and took proceedings against the offender. Said the magistrate: "Come, now, you don't really believe he meant to put your eye out?" "Faith, you're right, this time," said Pat, "for I believe he tried to put it farther in."

INTERESTING NEWS ARTICLES

FIND PIN STOLEN YEARS AGO

A valuable stickpin, stolen from the late Wilbur Eliason, of Chestertown, Md., forty-six years ago, was recovered by the police of Kansas City, Mo., when found on a prisoner. The pin bears Mr. Eliason's name. The Chief of Police of the Western city wrote to the Chestertown authorities in trying to get a record of the thief. Mr. Eliason was relieved of his valuables while a student at Yale College in 1874.

WOMAN GETS A SHAVE

Shaving a woman customer in Chester, Pa., was a new experience and an unusual one when Showden B. Maslin, a knight of the razor, was called upon to perform the operation.

The barber's first thought was that the woman patron was about to engage his services to trim a youngster's golden tresses. Then he concluded that she must be a book agent, but when she coolly removed her hat and veil and placed them on one of the hat hooks like a "regular feller" and slipped into one of the big chairs, he looked at her with astonishment.

With the instruction "once over," the woman settled herself for the business in hand.

"Do you really wish to be shaved?" inquired the barber.

"Certainly I do," was the determined answer.

After the operation was completed the woman paid the price, entered an automobile and was driven away.

NEVER WEAR RINGS NEAR MACHINERY

Most people would imagine that the condemnation of harmful luxuries by doctors would happen most frequently in the office with rich patients, but surgeons attached to large industries could tell that neither fines nor thought of others seems able to eradicate the love of finery, says the New York Medical Journal. Three cases of finger or hand crushing have happened recently in laundries owing to rings being worn. The law decrees that all flatiron workers must be equipped with guards in front of the feed rolls to prevent the hands of feeders from being drawn into the rollers, and ringed fingers were found especially dangerous, yet nothing seems able to instill the idea of self-preservation at the small cost of giving up some finery in work hours.

It is not only the girls but the men who sometimes put adornment before safety. Do they realize—just to give one instance—that the rim of a circular saw is moving at the rate of one to two miles a minute? Perhaps not, but the printed warnings against wearing rings or gloves are before their eyes. All the same, smashed fingers and hands appear with horrible frequency, and the public blame the employer for what was in reality contributory negligence on the part of the worker.

STRENUOUS TIMES AFTER CIVIL WAR

The dearth of houses and high rentals are not unprecedented; practically the same situation prevailed following the Civil War, according to

William Shepard of No. 80 Richmond Avenue, Port Richmond, S. I.

"I was then living on the west side of Lafayette Avenue, near Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn, and occupied a three-family brick house," said Mr. Shepard. "The rental was \$250 a year. The landlord served warning that because of the high cost of living he would have to raise the rent to \$600 a year. A friend living on Staten Island advised me to move there and where rents were cheaper. This was in 1866. I did so, renting a two and a half-story frame house on St. Paul's Avenue, Tompkinsville, for \$300 a year. But in those days there were no improvements in dwelling houses. We were obliged to go for our water supply to a pump on the corner.

"A short time ago I saw the house in Brooklyn where I had lived fifty-four years ago. Aside from the installation of modern improvements it was unchanged. "We thought in 1866 that the \$300 I was paying for a year's habitation of the three-story house at Lafayette and Marcy Avenues was a high figure. Before that I had rented three-story brick houses near that spot for \$110 and \$150 a year.

"Following the Civil War, the cost of living increased to double that of normal times. There was then, however, no adulteration or shortweighing of foodstuffs. Prices were higher, but you got the quality in whatever you bought.

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GOOD READING

TERRIER GOES HOME BACKWARD

The remarkable instinct of a fox terrier was again proved when recently a dog of that breed belonging to a Maidstone farmer, in England, found his way home when his head was imprisoned in a drain pipe and so firmly lodged there that he could not release himself.

The terrier disappeared from his home and was gone several days, the farmer and his family meanwhile fearing he had been lost or stolen. Finally the dog, half starved, was seen crawling backwards across a field toward his home, dragging with him the drain pipe in which his head was firmly wedged. It was necessary to break the pipe before the terrier could be released. It is thought that he got trapped in the pipe while pursuing a rabbit.

TOLL OF THE JUNGLE

India still pays its annual tribute of human life to the jungle. In fact, the number of deaths from snake bite or the attacks of wild animals has steadily increased during the last few years, a fact which has been attributed to the great floods. The rising waters have driven the serpents out of the lowlands up into the villages, and have diminished through drowning the natural food supply of the larger wild beasts.

According to the latest annual figures available, 55 persons were killed by elephants, 25 by hyenas, 109 by bears, 351 by leopards, 319 by wolves, 853 by tigers and 688 by other animals, including wild pigs. No less than 22,478 died from the bite of poisonous snakes. The grand total of mortality is 24,878.

The losses on the part of the inhabitants of the jungle were nearly but not quite as great as those of their human enemies and the domesticated animals combined. Ninety-one thousand one hundred and four snakes and over 19,000 wild beasts of various kinds were killed.

A great many cases of snake bite were successfully treated with the Brunton lancet and permanganate of potash, but it is, nevertheless, impossible to assert the value of this treatment, since no one knows whether all, or even a large number, of the cases treated were caused by the bites of really venomous snakes.

FOUGHT BULL BAREHANDED

An exceptional barehanded struggle against an enraged bull ended only when his brother-in-law came to his aid with a rifle, resulted in saving the life of Howard Richardson, thirty-two years old, who, with his wife, resides on the Elias Richardson farm, about four miles east of Victor, N. Y.

When the animal and other cattle broke into a field on the Richardson farm, Howard Richardson went to drive them out. He was attacked by the enraged bull and thrown to the ground, where the bull proceeded to stamp upon him. Charles Lovejoy, a brother-in-law of Richardson, was passing the house with his family in an auto and witnessed the attack. Lovejoy went to Richardson's assistance while Mrs. Lovejoy ran to the

house and got a rifle. Lovejoy found Richardson prostrate on the ground, with the bull backing off for repeated attacks on the man.

Each rush, however, was met by the attacked man gouging his fingers deep into the animal's eyes, staying the advances to some extent. The gouging tactics on the part of Richardson saved his life, for had the enraged animal reached his victim's chest or head with his hoofs death would have resulted.

Lovejoy was unable to shoot the animal in a vital part for fear of hitting Richardson, but finally managed to put three or four bullets through the bull's thighs, forcing temporary abandonment of the attack. Richardson was immediately lifted over the fence, and, with a few more shots, Lovejoy killed the bull.

Richardson was badly bruised over his entire body, but it is believed that he will recover.

TRAIL OF AN ORANGE CAT

Seventeen men who are in prison or under bail to-day, accused of being implicated in the theft or disposal of \$360,000 worth of German dyes, have only a dingy, emaciated white kitten of disreputable ancestry and habits to thank for their plight. As the kitten is still prowling about the rat coverts and scrap heaps of the Hoboken waterfront, it is unlikely that they ever will have an opportunity to express their gratitude.

The dyes, part of the German indemnity to the United States, were stolen July 9 from a warehouse of the Textile Alliance, Inc., in Hoboken, N. J., where they were in the custody of the government. Two days later the kitten crossed the path of a Federal detective as he lounged despondently near a pier in Hoboken, speculating on the meagre facts then in his possession concerning the dye theft.

The kitten was one to arouse the interest of a naturalist as well as a detective, for among the sombre and squalid stains upon its coat were splotches of vivid orange, of just the shade of some of the stolen dyes. The detective followed the kitten. Catwise, it led him along an erratic and noisome route which ended when it slipped through a cellar window of a lodging-house near the river.

Before it vanished, however, the detectives clipped a bunch of its orange hair. This was analyzed and found to contain substances which identified the coloring matter as of German origin. Thereafter every occupant of the house was watched.

One of them, with two other men, was arrested as he rode in an automobile behind a motor truck containing about \$180,000 worth of German dyes, the arrest taking place just outside Paterson, N. J. Information obtained from these prisoners led to the discovery of about \$60,000 worth of dyes on an abandoned farm in Orange County, and the investigation of the Widder Dye and Chemical Company, 155 Broadway, Brooklyn.

OLD COTTON- WOOD ONCE A HANDSPIKE

At Norris City, Ill., there is a tree known as the "vaulting-pole cottonwood" that has an interesting history which is told by the American Forestry Magazine as follows:

Hosea Pierce and a boy comrade returned from the War of 1812 to their homes, near Norris City, in the spring of 1815, and on Jan. 8 of that year they had helped Gen. Jackson whip the British in the Battle of New Orleans.

These boys both attended a log rolling on the old Pierce farm that spring, and as they were returning to the house after their day's work made a wager who could vault the furthest, using their cottonwood handspikes as vaulting poles. They both left their handspikes sticking in the soft earth where they had vaulted, and during the spring rains of 1815 they both took root and lived.

One of these trees died about ten years ago, but the other is still living and is 105 years old. This tree is about thirty feet in circumference, 175 feet high, with a very large hollow in the base of the tree which has been used as a housing for setting hens, and a kennel for dogs.

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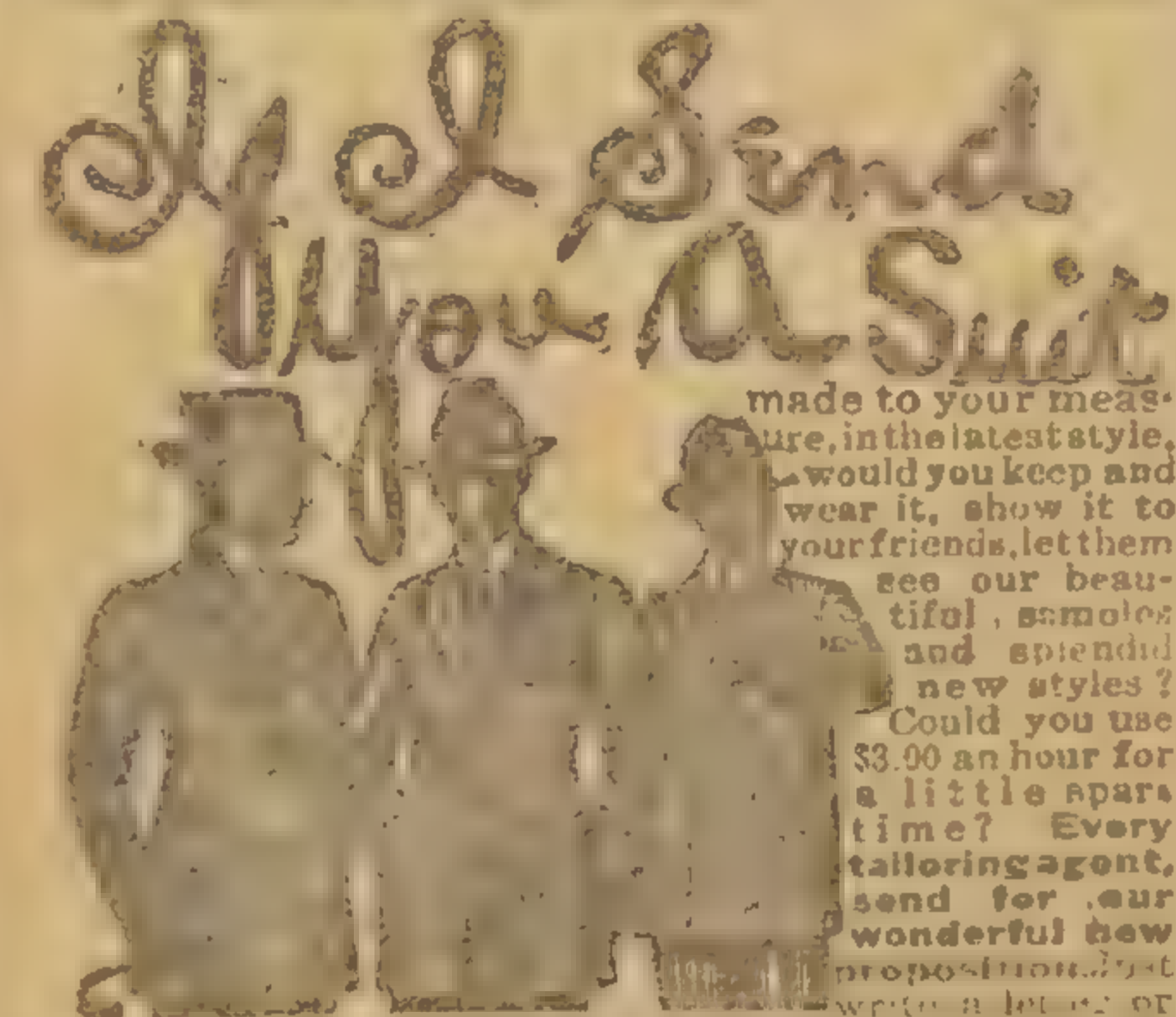
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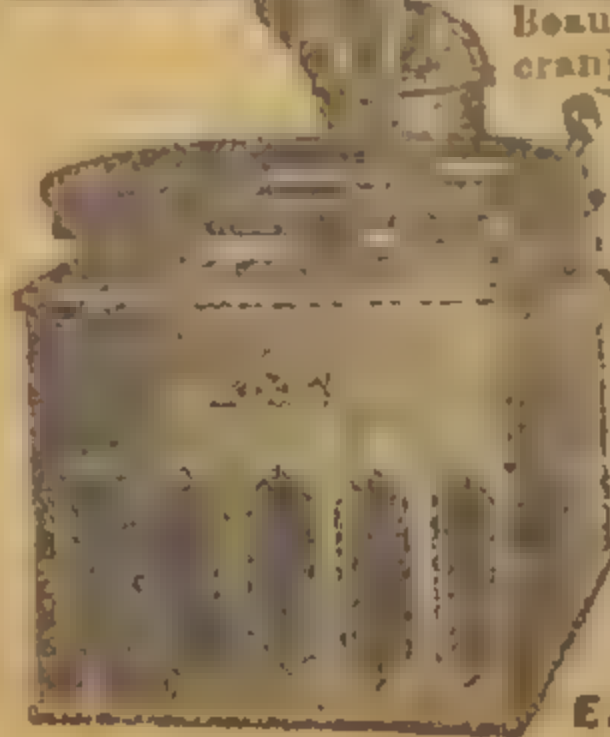
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MOTIVE POWER FROM STRAW

Gas possessing explosive qualities sufficient to drive an automobile and which may also be used for illumination is being produced at the Arlington experimental farm of the Department of Agriculture from the distillation of ordinary field straw. In making this announcement tonight experts of the department added that "the possibilities of straw gas are not yet fully determined."

A special force has been detailed to the Arlington station to continue the tests with various straws and to work out a model plant for the distillation of the gas.

"If a suitable unit can be constructed," the announcement said, "so that the farmers initial cost will be small, it seems likely that straw gas may have a certain economic value in sections of the country where the raw material is now considered a waste and is burned or left to rot on the fields."

Distillation of gas from straw under the process now being used at Arlington, it was said, was first accomplished by George Harrison, a Canadian engineer, in 1914.

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Are you troubled with sleeplessness at night and dullness in the morning until you have doped yourself with the nicotine of cigarettes or pipe, or chewing tobacco? They're all the same, you know.

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SAY SAINTS WERE KILLED BY DEMONS

The murder and mutilation of three of the seven occupants of a camp of sadhus, or religious mendicants, outside the city of Rawalpindi has been attributed by the masses, Mohammedan as well as Hindu, to supernatural agency, and is reported by the frontier correspondent of the Englishman to have caused the greatest excitement throughout the Rawalpindi, Nowshera, and Peshawar districts, so that for the time being "politics is forgotten altogether."

The term sadhu is derived from a Sanskrit word denoting completeness, and means one who is perfect—a saint or sage. It is commonly used of all Hindu religious mendicants. Clad generally only in a loin-cloth and with his body covered with ashes, the sadhu wanders up and down the country with his begging bowl in hand, and is held in great veneration and awe. Hence there is widespread belief that the crime was not the work of human beings at all, but of rakshahs, or demons, who in the days of the Hindu epics were often seen on earth, and have now returned.

In the morning the bodies of the three sadhus were found tied to trees and terribly mutilated. The surviving four men were cowering around a fire, muttering charms and in a great state of excitement and fear. They are reported to have informed the police that the camp was attacked by a band of men, who selected the three victims and cut them to pieces, warning the others that if they attempted to interfere they would also be killed.

But this did not prevent the rakshah theory gaining ground, and a panic ensued in the city. All business ceased, shops were closed, and houses shuttered and barred. The bolder spirits went down to the scene of the crime to see for themselves, but what they saw only convinced them the more of demoniac agency.

New York judge (to criminal)—"And the sentence of the court is that you be shocked with electricity until you are dead, and may—" Criminal (interrupting)—"That's played out, judge. You can't work that on me." New York judge—"Silence in the court! What's the matter?" Criminal—"Electricity won't shock me, judge. Nothing else, either. I've read 'The Quick or the Dead?'"

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